

Ukraine bombings point to growing political tensions

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30 April 2012

Four explosions in the eastern Ukraine city of Dnipropetrovsk injured 27 people, including nine children, Friday.

No individual or group has claimed responsibility for planting the bombs, which were left in trashcans in busy public areas of the city center. Dnipropetrovsk, an industrial city located 250 miles southeast of Kiev, is in a majority Russian-speaking area of Ukraine.

President Viktor Yanukovich described the bombings as “yet another challenge for us, for the entire nation” and offered a reward of 2 million hryvnias (\$250,000) for information leading to the arrest of the bomber or bombers. The interior minister, members of the national security service, and senior public prosecutors traveled to Dnipropetrovsk on Friday to investigate the explosions, which government spokesmen said were being treated as terrorist attacks.

Though most of her support comes from the Ukrainian-speaking west of the country, Dnipropetrovsk is the hometown of imprisoned opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko. One of the richest people in the country, Tymoshenko was a leader of the Orange Revolution in 2004, the US-orchestrated coup to prevent Yanukovich, the candidate backed by Russia, from assuming the presidency.

In the 2010 presidential vote, Yanukovich went on to beat Tymoshenko, who also lost her position as prime minister. Tymoshenko was then handed a seven-year prison sentence for “abuse of public office.”

Imprisoned since October, Tymoshenko has recently complained of being assaulted by guards. Her supporters released photographs Friday, the day of the explosions, allegedly showing bruises on the opposition leader’s body. Tymoshenko has been on a hunger strike for over a week to demand her release from prison in order to receive medical treatment in

Germany for back pain.

Tymoshenko’s imprisonment has been seized upon by opponents of Yanukovich, and by leading German politicians in particular, as a means to pressure the Yanukovich regime into making further concession to Western-based interests in Ukraine.

On Thursday, the day before the blasts in Dnipropetrovsk, German President Joachim Gauck rejected an offer to visit Ukraine, citing his concern over the treatment of Tymoshenko. This has been followed by a string of high-profile calls for a boycott of the Euro2012 soccer matches in Ukraine this summer.

“There can be no normal relations with Ukraine as long as people are jailed and abused in the country for political reasons,” opposition Social Democratic Party spokesman Sigmar Gabriel told the *Bild* newspaper last week. The line was echoed by German Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich, whose portfolio includes sports, who suggested that Berlin could call for a boycott of championship games in Ukraine.

German Environment Minister Norbert Roettgen intensified the rhetoric against Ukraine, declaring that the government of Yanukovich was a “dictatorship.”

Faced with this barrage of criticism from Germany, an additional court case against Tymoshenko on charges of tax evasion was suspended on Sunday, with the presiding judge claiming that a trial would be impossible due to the ex-prime minister’s refusal to attend court on health grounds. The trial has been rescheduled for May 21.

Tymoshenko and Yanukovich represent competing sections of the bourgeoisie of Ukraine. Yanukovich is the principal political representative of big business figures whose vast fortunes rest on their ownership of the formerly nationalized heavy industries of coal

mining, steel production, armaments, and petrochemicals based in the east of the country. These oligarchs, though rivals of the Russian ruling class, have sought to maintain political ties with Russia since the end of the USSR in order to protect the myriad business deals between the two ex-Soviet republics.

Tymoshenko, who with her husband made hundreds of millions of dollars from the privatized natural gas industry in the 1990s, represents a section of the ruling elite in Ukraine that has sought to weaken ties to Russia in order to orient toward the European Union (EU), the United States and NATO. While rejecting NATO membership, Yanukovich also supports Ukraine's accession to the EU, which provides a vital export market for the country's industrial goods.

While the US administration of Barack Obama has reduced Washington's focus on the eastern European region, in order to prosecute the "AfPak" war and ramp up US belligerence against China, the German bourgeoisie has stepped in to assert its geopolitical interests in what it regards as its backyard.

Faced with deep economic problems within its current 27 member states, the EU, led by Germany, is highly reluctant to accept Ukraine, yet another economically devastated country, into the club. Ukraine's economy has been hit hard by the financial collapse of 2008 and the subsequent global economic crisis, and was forced to take an emergency loan from the International Monetary Fund in 2009. The official unemployment rate in the country stands at 8.5 percent, with some 35 percent of the population living below the poverty line. However, German and other European leaders are eager to use Ukraine's lengthy EU accession process to pressure Kiev into opening the country still further to Western capital, while weakening the influence of the Kremlin.



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