

Former Ukrainian Prime Minister Tymoshenko tours Washington to garner support for presidential bid

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Over the past several days, Yulia Tymoshenko, the former prime minister of Ukraine and head of the All-Ukrainian Union “Fatherland” party, has toured Washington to garner support for her presidential bid in the elections in March 2019. Early polling sees her as the front-runner, leading the rest of the potential candidates in a crowded field by nearly twofold.

The campaign for president is formally not set to start until after the end of the state of martial law that the Poroshenko regime declared in 10 of the country’s 24 oblasts (provinces) after it had provoked a clash with the Russian navy in the Kerch Strait, which links the Azov Sea to the Black Sea, in late November.

The current president, Petro Poroshenko, who was brought to power in a US-backed coup carried out by far-right forces in February 2014, is highly unlikely to win. A recent poll by Rating showed that 51.4 percent of Ukrainians would refuse to vote for Poroshenko “under any circumstances.” After years of civil war in the East of the country, which claimed the lives of over 10,000 people, and brutal austerity measures that have provoked a wave of working-class struggles this year, there is widespread hatred of the Poroshenko regime.

Under these conditions, sections of the imperialist elites see Tymoshenko, an oligarch like Poroshenko, as someone willing and able to continue to implement brutal assaults on the working class and their anti-Russia policy.

While Tymoshenko is performing better than her opponents in the polls, according to the most recent poll by the International Republican Institute’s (IRI) Center for Insights in Survey Research, if the elections were held today Tymoshenko would garner only 14 percent of the vote among decided voters. Other polls have shown her winning over 20 percent of the vote in the first round compared to just 10 percent for Poroshenko.

Tymoshenko has long been known as an ardent supporter of Ukrainian membership in both the EU and NATO. She maintains close ties to Washington and Berlin, in particular.

Tymoshenko, who used to be one of Ukraine’s richest people due to her involvement with the country’s gas business, first rose to political fame as one of the leading figures in Ukraine’s 2004 US-backed “Orange Revolution.” She subsequently served as the country’s prime minister and ran for president in 2010, narrowly losing to the now deposed former President Viktor Yanukovich.

She was imprisoned on corruption charges by the Yanukovich government, which was ousted by the coup in February 2014, due to embezzlement charges from a gas deal she negotiated with Russia. At that point she again became a darling of western governments hostile to Yanukovich and his perceived closeness to Moscow. In 2011-2012, German politicians and media were engaged in a frenzied and expensive PR campaign to prop up her image as a martyr under conditions where she was widely hated in the Ukrainian working class.

She was only released due to the 2014 US-backed right-wing coup of the Yanukovich government and later lost the presidential elections that year to Petro Poroshenko.

However, there are some concerns about Tymoshenko’s reliability in the anti-Russia military buildup due to her former business dealings with Russia’s state-owned natural gas company Gazprom. In 2008 as prime minister, she was criticized for being insufficiently militaristic against Russia during the war with NATO-backed Georgia. *Politico* described her in early December as “unpredictable, a mercurial and opportunistic shapeshifter who has veered from arch-Ukrainian nationalist to Kremlin partner and back.” According to the publication,

in 2014, the US “worked aggressively to prevent her return to politics.”

In an attempt to assuage all fears of her falling out of line, Tymoshenko toured Washington over the past several days, speaking to influential think tanks and politicians and the media. The ultimate goal of Tymoshenko’s visit was to allay any concerns Ukraine’s western puppet masters may have while promising to continue with United States’ militarization of the country and the Black Sea following the November 25 confrontation between the Ukrainian and Russian navies in the Kerch Strait.

Tymoshenko is also keenly aware of the fact that United States backing will also be necessary to ensure that the elections in March will take place at all. The declaration of martial law in Ukraine is widely seen by Poroshenko’s political opponents as a thinly veiled attempt to delay or cancel the upcoming elections. Tymoshenko herself has criticized Poroshenko’s introduction of martial law as a political campaign and called for it to be ended earlier than planned.

In an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* on Saturday, Tymoshenko attempted to cater to the Democratic Party-led anti-Russia campaign in the US by portraying herself as a victim of the now imprisoned Paul Manafort, claiming that he was paid to discredit her among western governments in 2010 (when she was running against Yanukovych) and that he helped “steal her election.”

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, over the past days, “Ms. Tymoshenko has held a flurry of meetings with prominent lawmakers, including Sens. Tom Cotton (R., Ark.) and Dick Durbin (D., Ill.), Kurt Volker, the top U.S. envoy for Ukraine negotiations at the State Department, and several major think tanks.”

Tymoshenko met with the Atlantic Council, a Washington DC think tank thoroughly embedded in the country’s military intelligence apparatus. Tymoshenko reported to the Ukrainian press that during her meeting she “thanked the United States for the help and support of our state. I called for increased sanctions against Russian aggression, and I also stressed the need to assist the naval forces of Ukraine.”

In an indication that influential sections of the American elites are preparing for a Tymoshenko presidency, the Atlantic Council wrote in late November, “What will happen if the former prime minister, her party, and their allies take over government next year is difficult to predict, but the West should prepare now for that

possibility. ...her prospective ascendancy should also be seen as a chance for a new start, improved relations with the West, and progressive development of the country as a whole.”

Tymoshenko also enjoys the support of influential sections of the Ukrainian oligarchy, of which she herself has been part since the destruction of the USSR. Thus, she has already secretly met with Ukrainian oligarch Victor Pinchuk at least twice since April of this year. She also has close ties to billionaire oligarch Igor Kolomoisky and is granted significant coverage and support on his 1+1 television station.

At home in Ukraine, Tymoshenko is fraudulently attempting to portray herself as an opponent of the oligarchic far-right Poroshenko government in the guise of a populist running against the IMF and its highly unpopular “reforms.”

In response to recent protests against an IMF-directed hike in consumer gas prices, Tymoshenko called the country’s acquiescence to IMF demands “economic genocide” and has vowed to cut gas prices in half across the country and halt cuts to pensions and health care if elected.

Furthermore, Tymoshenko has promised to end the country’s highly unpopular war against breakaway regions in eastern Ukraine “diplomatically” while continuing with the country’s attempts to formally join NATO despite Russian objections. In order to gain support from war-weary voters while maintaining imperialist backing she has promised a “peace strategy” in public statements while at the same time announcing plans to create a “war cabinet” within her administration if she wins.

That these attempts to appeal to the widespread antiwar moods in the Ukrainian population are completely fraudulent was not only proven by Tymoshenko’s trip to Washington, but also her threats in 2014 to use nuclear weapons against the Ukraine’s Russian population in response to the annexation of Crimea. In her vulgar outburst back then, she also said about the Russian president Vladimir Putin that she was “ready to hold a pistol and shoot that bastard in the head.”



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