

EU Deal Must Not Hinge on Tymoshenko, Says Former Ukraine Presidential Candidate

Written by Australian Business

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Former Ukraine Presidential candidate Anatoly Hrytsenko says President Yanukovich's pro-European leadership is vital for national unity, and the success or failure of his quest for an Association Agreement with the European Union should not hinge on the Tymoshenko issue.

Hrytsenko, a 2010 Presidential candidate and former Defence Minister, has become the latest Opposition political figure to support the EU deal. As it stands, all political parties in the country, except for the communists, now support Ukraine's European integration over Russia's Customs Union.

Hrytsenko also offered measured praise for Yanukovich, his one-time rival, for standing up to recent Russian pressure against Ukraine, saying: "I wish him and the businessmen opposing the Customs Union with Russia to stay firm."

He added that it is unfair that the issue of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko's release from prison should be a major condition for signing the Association Agreement, saying the matter has reached "undeservingly large proportions." He further believes she should help her country's cause by speaking out in favour of the deal ahead of the November decision.

"A lot depends on Yanukovich since he has the power, but certain steps should be taken by Tymoshenko," he said, adding that he believes Ukraine's chances are now only 50-50 due in large part to the Tymoshenko issue. The former Prime Minister was convicted for abuse of office for illegally signing a controversial \$10 billion gas deal with Russia in 2009 without Cabinet approval.

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Hrytsenko, the former "Our Ukraine" candidate, also warned of the consequences of Ukraine being shut out of the EU deal. He said that Europe would end up having even less influence over key decisions in Kiev, including the issue of selective justice. Judicial reform has been a key benchmark Ukraine has had to meet to qualify for the Association Agreement.

Should the Association Agreement be signed in November it could be ratified by the European Parliament as early as May, although the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement that goes with the deal, is likely to be implemented immediately.

SOURCE Ukraine Monitor