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Representatives of Canadian Friends of Ukraine attend Tymoshenko trial

KYIV , UKRAINE: Representatives of Canadian Friends of Ukraine (CFU)—a Canadian NGO which fosters democracy in Ukraine and promotes inter-parliamentary relations between Ukraine and Canada—were in Kyiv recently and attended the trial of former Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko held at the Pechersky Regional Court.

CFU President Margareta Shpir and Director of the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Centre Lisa Shymko attended the August 25 Pechersky Regional Court proceedings. Opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko is on trial on charges of concluding an illegal gas-price deal with Russia in 2009.

The representatives of Canadian Friends of Ukraine were in the small court room together with representatives of the Ukrainian and international media, as well as prominent parliamentarians Borys Tarasyuk, Andriy Shkil, and others. Ex-premier Yulia Tymoshenko's daughter, Zhenia Carr, sat next to her mother during the proceedings.

During the trial, in a barely audible voice, Judge Rodion Kireyev read selected excerpts from documents that the prosecution had submitted into evidence. Several hours into the proceedings, one of Madame Tymoshenko's defense attorneys asked that the judge read all of the documents submitted and not merely the synopsis or document headings. On the day of the trial, only 7 volumes of a total of 18 volumes of documents had been read.

The Canadian NGO representatives were struck by the disproportionately large number of Ministry of Internal Affairs security agents, known as "Gryphon" forces, present in the very small court room. The special security forces stood facing the public gallery, creating an atmosphere of intimidation.

During a break in the court proceedings, ex-Premier Y. Tymoshenko spoke briefly with the two Canadian Friends of Ukraine representatives. In 2003, the former Prime Minister of Ukraine was part of a delegation of high-profile Ukrainian parliamentarians who visited Canada at the invitation of Canadian Friends of Ukraine.

Upon leaving the court, CFU representatives Margareta Shpir and Lisa Shymko held a press conference outside the Pechersky Regional Court building. The media scrum included representatives of Ukraine's

leading media outlets including television channels *1-ший Національний, 1+1, 24 TV, ТБ, 5-тий Канал, СТБ, СiТi, Інтер, ICTV, Глас, НТН* and the German news outlet *Berhner Zeitung*.

The Ukrainian-Canadians were asked by the press about the role that their NGO plays in Ukraine. Ms.



Shpir commented that “our non-governmental organization works to promote democracy. As Canadians, we believe that a government must work in the interests of its people, not the other way around. A prosperous Ukraine is not a goal in itself. It must be integrally linked to the entrenchment of all aspects of democracy, including the values of human rights and the rule of law.”

When asked about the reaction of other countries to the Tymoshenko trial, Lisa Shymko remarked that Canada and the European Union were closely monitoring the proceedings of the trial. “The cornerstone of Canada’s foreign policy is the promotion of all the institutions that form a democratic civil society, including an impartial judiciary and a free press. If Ukraine’s current course continues, I fear that this may jeopardize its international position including entry into the EU.”

In an unrelated matter, in the aftermath of the mass demonstrations marking the 20th anniversary of Ukraine’s independence, several prominent members of Ukraine’s opposition were taken in for questioning by authorities on August 29th.

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