

Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich visited Sochi yesterday (August 11), where he met with Russian President Dmitri Medvedev.

The visit came as the Yanukovich administration faced several intertwined challenges from domestic to foreign policy.

These challenges will serve to increase political pressure on Yanukovich as he strives to maneuver between all of these competing forces.

On the domestic front, the leading issue is the recent arrest of former Prime Minister Yulia Timoshenko. Timoshenko has been on trial for what the current government calls "the abuse of power" while she was prime minister in striking a natural gas deal with Russia, which she allegedly did for her own personal gain. Timoshenko was arrested last Friday for court misconduct and this has sparked outrage from many of her supporters, as well as other people that claim that Yanukovich is abusing his power as president and going after his political opponents.

Protests have been occurring in the capital city of Kiev since the trial began but has picked up since Timoshenko's arrest.

This domestic political development has had foreign implications as well, as several Western countries, most notably the US and Poland, have spoken out against Yanukovich's decision to arrest Timoshenko.

This could have a negative impact on what the Yanukovich administration says is its top foreign policy priority, which is to sign an association and free trade agreement with the EU by the end of this year.

Yanukovich would like to avoid the precedent set by Belarus where political and social crackdowns have led to the isolation of the regime of Yanukovich by the EU and the West at large.

Meanwhile, the more pressing issue, and one that Timoshenko's arrest could have a direct impact on, is Ukraine's ongoing natural gas negotiations with Russia.

Ukraine is trying to negotiate for a lower price for the natural gas that Russia sends it as it will soon be affected by the debut of Nord Stream which will take away from much of Ukraine's transit revenue.

Russia has hinted that it will consider lowering gas prices for Ukraine but only on the condition that Russian energy behemoth Gazprom would form a merger with Ukrainian energy firm Naftagas.

While Yanukovich has been pushing against this outcome, a growing isolation from the West would make this more difficult to avoid.

Therefore, Yanukovich has several intertwined issues to deal with as the political pressure on him mounts.

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