

Ukraine Rushes Through Russian-Language Bill

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KIEV — Ukraine's parliament on Tuesday rushed through a contentious bill upgrading the status of the Russian language, sparking scuffles between pro-government and opposition deputies who fear it will boost the country's ties to Russia.

The chamber approved the bill in its second and final reading minutes after a surprise proposal by one of the majority party leaders, giving opponents little time to cast their vote.

"Every [procedure] that could be violated has been violated," Arseniy Yatsenyuk, the leader of the largest opposition bloc, told reporters after the vote.

Opposition members of parliament tried and failed to physically stop the speaker from calling the vote, provoking scuffles with members of the ruling party. When that failed, they walked out in protest.

Language policy is an emotive subject in the former Soviet republic of 45 million people whose state language is Ukrainian, but where a significant number of people speak Russian as

their mother tongue.

If signed into law by President Viktor Yanukovych — the last stage in the approval process — the bill would recognize Russian as a "regional" language in predominantly Russian-speaking areas such as Yanukovych's home region of Donetsk, enabling its use in public service.

Supporters of the bill, drafted by members of Yanukovych's Party of the Regions, argue that it will make life easier for Ukraine's large Russian-speaking population, allowing their children to receive schooling in their mother tongue.

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