

Azarov Faces Vote From Rowdy Ukrainian Parliament

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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KIEV — Protests by a re-energized opposition and procedural wrangling at the opening of a new parliament threatened to push back Wednesday's scheduled vote to endorse Mykola Azarov for a new term as Ukrainian prime minister.

The vote is the first test of the support that President Viktor Yanukovich, who re-nominated Azarov, commands in the new chamber.

Yanukovich's pro-business Party of the Regions and their allies enjoyed a strong majority in the last parliament, which allowed them to push through changes to the electoral law and a law on use of the Russian language that sparked street protests.

While it is still the biggest single party, it lost seats in the Oct. 28 election.

Most analysts believed horse-trading would ensure enough support from independents

and others to secure the required 226 or more seats. But the new opposition line-up, whose leaders have ruled out any coalition with the Regions Party, quickly showed their teeth.

In what appeared to be simply muscle-flexing, the three main opposition parties sought to delay a vote on Azarov's nomination, arguing that parliamentary procedure required him to meet all factions first.

Deputies from the Batkivshchyna, or Fatherland, bloc, whose leader is jailed former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko, appeared in the chamber wearing black sweaters bearing her portrait and stickers calling for political prisoners to be freed.

New opposition faces who took the collective oath included world heavyweight boxing champion Vitaly Klitschko, who heads the UDAR, or Punch, party, and Oleh Tyahnybok, leader of the Svoboda far-right nationalists who made a surprisingly strong showing in the October poll.

Outside the parliament building, Svoboda deputies cut down part of a perimeter fence with a chainsaw and also broke down a door in what they called a protest against parliament's alienation from the people.

Azarov is a staid 64-year-old conservative who has been prime minister since Yanukovych was elected in Feb. 2010. With the opening session bogged down in procedural issues, it was possible the vote on Azarov would be put back until Thursday.

By nominating Azarov for a second term as prime minister, Yanukovych opted to keep a predictable loyalist by his side rather than back riskier alternatives.

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