

Ukrainian Parliament Erupts in Brawls as Speaker, Premier Appointed

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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KIEV — Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich's ruling party installed allies in the posts of parliament speaker and prime minister Thursday despite brawls triggered by opposition attempts to block the votes.

Deputies wrestled with each other in a mass of bodies around the main rostrum in parliament after the opposition physically tried to prevent the vote on Volodymyr Rybak's nomination as speaker.

Backed by their traditional Communist allies, Yanukovich's Party of the Regions secured 250 votes — 226 were required — backing Rybak. Mykola Azarov was voted in for a second term as prime minister with 252 votes.

In equally rowdy scenes Wednesday, opposition deputies paralyzed the session by encircling the rostrum to sabotage the ruling coalition's plans to ease Azarov rapidly into a second term

as prime minister.

The vote on Azarov's nomination was an early test of the support Yanukovich, who is expected to run for a second term as president in 2015, commands in the new chamber.

On Thursday, opposition deputies swarmed the rostrum when a vote on the appointment of Rybak as speaker was about to be announced. They clashed with a group of Regions deputies.

Opposition deputies chanted "shame" whenever a Regions member spoke in Russian, and they tried to remove one Russian speaker from the rostrum. But they were held off by Regions lawmakers as Azarov, a staid 64-year-old conservative, looked on bemused.

Rybak comes from Donetsk, an eastern Ukrainian industrial hub that is the power base of the Regions, and he worked as Yanukovich's deputy when he headed the government in 2006 and 2007.

The opposition, which includes deputies loyal to jailed former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, nationalists from the far-right Svoboda and a liberal party led by boxing champion Vitaly Klitschko, accuse the ruling coalition of trying to ram through voting despite violations of parliamentary rules.

The pro-business Party of the Regions and its allies enjoyed a strong majority in the last parliament.

But though it is still the biggest single party, it lost seats in the Oct. 28 election and faces an opposition that has been re-energized by the arrival of Svoboda and Klitschko's UDAR (Punch) party.

Klitschko stayed away from the brawling, jokingly telling the Ukrainska Pravda newspaper that his punches would have been too dangerous.

"I understand that many people want Klitschko to launch an offensive, but I would like to remind [them] that, for example, in the United States, a boxer's fists are considered weapons and the fists of a world champion are considered nuclear weapons," he said. "We will not use these weapons for now."

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