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Ukraine Angers Russia With Vote to Work Towards NATO Membership

By The Moscow Times

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Parliamentary deputies sing the national anthem during the first session of the new Ukrainian parliament, which was elected in October, in Kiev.

KIEV — The Ukrainian parliament on Tuesday renounced Ukraine's "non-aligned" status with the aim of eventually joining NATO, angering Moscow, which views the Western alliance's eastward expansion as a threat to its own security

Kiev first announced its intention of seeking the protection of NATO membership in August following what it deemed the open participation of Russia's military in a separatist war in Ukraine's eastern provinces.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov called Ukraine's renunciation of its neutral military and political status a "counterproductive" step that would only boost tensions around the crisis in the east.

"It will only escalate the confrontation and creates the illusion that it is possible to resolve Ukraine's deep internal crisis by passing such laws," TASS news agency quoted him as saying.

Addressing deputies in Kiev before the vote, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin said the move underscored the country's determination to pivot towards Europe and the West.

"This will lead to integration in the European and the Euro-Atlantic space," he said.

The amendment passed easily, receiving 303 votes, 77 more than the minimum required to pass into law.

Any accession to the Western military alliance is likely to take years, but a NATO spokesman in Brussels said: "Our door is open and Ukraine will become a member of NATO if it so requests and fulfills the standards and adheres to the necessary principles."

Ties between Moscow and Kiev are at an all-time low since Russia's annexation of the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine in March and the subsequent outbreak of the pro-Russian rebellion in the east.

The pro-Western authorities in Kiev accuse Russia of orchestrating and arming the uprising after the overthrow of a Ukrainian president sympathetic to Moscow. The Kremlin denies that it is behind the revolt.

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