

PACE Beefs Up Security After Attack on Russian Communists

By [Ivan Nechepurenko](#)

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The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) implemented heightened security measures Tuesday after a pair of Ukrainian nationalist lawmakers attacked two of their Russian Communist counterparts on the council's premises.

Prior to the start of PACE's first winter session Monday morning, Russian Communist Party lawmakers Gennady Zyuganov and Ivan Melnikov were confronted by Dmytro Linko and Artyom Vitko, parliamentarians with the Ukrainian Radical Party.

The lawmakers offered differing accounts of what happened next.

"At the entrance to PACE's building, Artyom Vitko and I hurled blood at the face of Russian Communist Zyuganov. We smacked him in his hostile mug," Ukraine's Linko wrote in a Facebook status update.

Russia's Melnikov downplayed the extent of the damage. "Two middle-aged Russian-speaking men tried to shove us. Someone said 'Ukraine' in some context. But nothing serious happened. The second we started to move toward them, they vanished," Melnikov told news agency Interfax on Tuesday.

In accordance with the stricter new security protocol, visitors were required to present their entry permits upon setting foot on PACE property, whereas they previously only had to produce these documents when entering a council building, Interfax reported.

The Russian lawmakers' fellow Communists urged a response from the Foreign Ministry on Tuesday. Lawmaker Sergei Obukhov asked State Duma Speaker Sergei Naryshkin to urge a reaction from the Foreign Ministry, in the form of an expression of indignation to Ukraine's ambassador to Russia.

Other deputies had more creative ideas. Dmitry Nosov of the Liberal Democratic Party suggested sending two particularly burly and athletic lawmakers — professional boxer Nikolai "Beast from the East" Valuev and Greco-Roman wrestler Alexander Karelin — to represent Russia in Strasbourg.

"Then the [Ukrainian] lawmakers will be less keen to solve issues using physical force," Nosov told reporters on Tuesday, Interfax reported.

The floor of Ukraine's parliament is a known hotspot for fistfights. The past couple of years have produced an abundance of headline-making brawls on the floor of the parliament. As a recent example, a December vote on the new distribution of legislative committee chairmanships erupted into a mass brawl between about two dozen parliamentarians.

Contact the author at i.nechepurenko@imedia.ru

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