



The reception room (presidential lounge)
© Parliamentary Administration/Mike Ranz



The historic assembly hall © Parliamentary Administration/Mike Ranz



REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA
Parliament

The Austrian Parliament

The National Council (*Nationalrat*)

The National Council (Nationalrat) consists of 183 members who are elected by the people for a term of five years. All Austrians who have reached the age of 16 are entitled to vote in this election.

The main task of the National Council is legislation. In the National Council, the legislative proposals which are submitted to the upper house by the delegates, the Federal Government, the Federal Council or through a referendum are usually subject to preliminary discussions by a committee before being voted on in a plenary session.

The control function of the National Council is just as important. The delegates have a number of tools at their disposal to control the correct application of the laws (their "execution"): oral and written inquiries to members of the Federal Government, audit assignments to the Court of Auditors or the employment of investigating committees. By its very nature, the control function is one of the main tasks of parliamentary opposition.

The National Council can also declare its wishes to the Federal Government through resolutions. The Federal Government depends on the trust of the National Council – if the Council were to express their distrust of the government, the Federal President would have to dismiss it. If the National Council issues opinions about proposals in the context of the EU, the Austrian representatives in the bodies of the EU are bound to these in principle.

The Federal Council (*Bundesrat*)

The Federal Council currently has 61 members who are elected by the parliaments of Austria's nine federal states for the legislative terms of the respective state parliaments. In this process each state sends at most twelve and at least three members to the Federal Council, depending on its size.

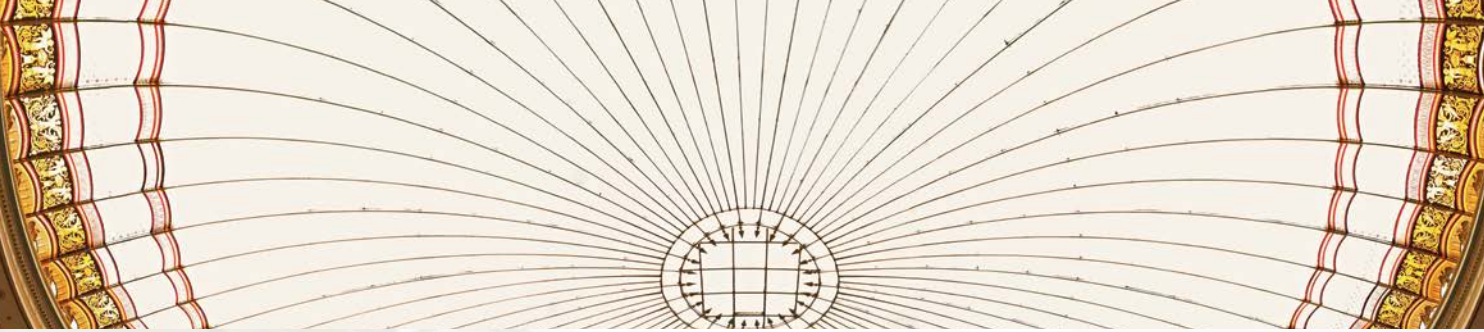
The Federal Council is responsible for representing the state interests on a federal level and participates in the legislation of the federation for this purpose. Any legislation or state treaties adopted up by the National Council are forwarded directly to the Federal Council and are usually subject to a preliminary discussion by a committee before the Federal Council conclusively decides on them in a plenary session.

The Federal Council can raise a substantiated objection to most of the legislation by the National Council. In such a case the National Council has to take up the legislation again, but can override the Federal Council's objection with a so-called vote of persistence (*Beharrungsbeschluss*). The Federal Council can only prevent a law (absolute right of veto) if said bill were to affect the authorities of the federal states.

The members of the Federal Council also have the right to direct questions to the members of the Federal Government. Furthermore, the Federal Council can make resolutions and can also become active in EU-related matters.



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*The glass roof in the historic assembly hall
© Parliamentary Administration/Mike Ranz*



The visitor's centre © Parliamentary Administration/Mike Ranz

The Parliament building

The Parliament Building on Vienna's Ringstrasse has accommodated various parliamentary bodies throughout its 130-year history. First it was the seat of the Imperial Council, the parliament of the Austrian half of the Habsburg monarchy. The building was constructed for this parliament from 1874 to 1884 according to plans by the Danish architect Theophil Hansen. Hansen's architectural concept wanted to evoke ancient Greece as the "cradle of democracy" and its design followed ancient models, which is why this style is also called historicism.

The building has two large assembly halls, which are connected by the central tract with its large column hall. This reflects the structure of the Imperial Council as defined in the monarchy, consisting two chambers – the House of Representatives and the House of Lords.

In 1918 the transition to the republic took place in the Parliament Building on the Ring. The "constituent national assembly" subsequently prepared Federal Constitutional Law, which forms the constitutional foundation of the Republic of Austria to this day.

From 1920 to 1934 and since 1945, the National Council and the Federal Council, the bodies of the Austrian federal legislation, have been housed in the Parliament Building. The Parliament Building was severely damaged during World War

II and nearly half of its building structures were destroyed. The reconstruction took place until 1956, where the assembly hall of the National Council was redesigned in a functional style that was modern at the time, while the remaining publicly accessible spaces and the exterior appearance of the Parliament Building were mostly restored to the original.

However, over the course of the years, some of Hansen's original building components along with newer ones – such as the roof, mechanical systems, heating of the individual spaces – succumbed to the ravages of time. As a result, it was decided to perform a comprehensive renovation, which includes updating the parliamentary work environment to state-of-the-art conditions.



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