

NOTES ON THE SENATE

Senate Committees

THE BASIC WORK OF THE SENATE IS CARRIED OUT IN COMMITTEES. The acts passed by the Sejm are submitted first to the Senate committees, which also examine draft acts authored by senators.

The Senate of the eleventh term set up the following 20 standing committees: the Budget and Public Finance Committee, the Education Committee, the National Economy and Innovativeness Committee, the Infrastructure Committee, the Climate and Environment Committee, the Culture and Media Committee, the Science Committee, the National Defense Committee, the Petitions Committee, the Human Rights and the Rule of Law Committee, the Rules, Ethics and Senatorial Affairs Committee, the Family, Senior and Social Policy Committee, the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, the Local Government and State Administration Committee, the Sports Committee, the Emigration Affairs and Contacts with Poles Abroad Committee, the European Union Affairs Committee, the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Legislation Committee and the Health Committee.

A committee may comprise **SUBCOMMITTEES**, which are set up to look into specific issues, e.g. in the Senate of the third term, the National Economy Committee set up the Subcommittee for Regional Policy. In the Senate of the seventh term, the National Economy Committee established the “Friendly State” Subcommittee, while the Legislation Committee established the Subcommittee for Constitutional Amendments.

THE SENATE MAY ALSO APPOINT SPECIAL COMMITTEES. The Senate of the first term set up the Economic Legislation Committee, which was in operation between December 1989 and April 1990. At the end of December 1990, due to an extremely difficult situation in the Polish mining sector, the Special Committee for the Mining Industry was established. The Senate of the second term set up a special committee to analyse the act on the ratification of the Europe Agreement establishing an association between European Communities and their Member States and the Republic of Poland, which was in operation between April and October 1992. In January 1993, it was replaced by the newly appointed Special Committee on European Integration. The Senate of the fourth term set up Special Committee on European Legislation. The Senate of tenth term set up the Special Committee on Climate Affairs, the Special Committee for the investigation of Russian influence on the decisions of public authorities in Poland and the Special Committee for the clarification of cases of illegal surveillance, their impact on the electoral process in the Republic of Poland and the reform of secret services.

Under the Rules and Regulations of the Senate, **A SENATOR IS OBLIGED TO BE A MEMBER OF AT LEAST 1 AND NO MORE THAN 2 STANDING COMMITTEES.** He or she may also take part in the work of other committees, but without the right to vote. The obligation to be a member of a committee does not apply to the Marshal and Deputy Marshals of the Senate.

A COMMITTEE IS USUALLY COMPOSED OF BETWEEN SEVERAL AND A DOZEN OR SO SENATORS. For each day of unexcused absence at a session of the committee, the salary and parliamentary allowance of the senator concerned is reduced by one-thirtieth. The Senate appoints and removes the chairmen of its committees, who



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Senate Committees

are responsible for organizing their work and activities. Vice chairpersons are elected by members of the committees themselves. The committees may work in joint sessions. In such a case, the chairman of one of the committees presides over the session.

THE COMMITTEES ARE MAINLY TASKED WITH examination of acts and compilation of reports on the Senate's draft resolutions concerning these acts. The committees may propose that the Senate should either:

- accept an act without amendments,
- amend the act, or
- reject the act.

A committee's decisions to that effect are always taken by a majority of votes, in the presence of at least one-third of its members. The relevant report is presented during a plenary sitting of the Senate by a senator chosen by the committee. During their work on specific acts, the committees may consult the Legislative Office of the Chancellery of the Senate or seek opinions of experts and groups and organisations interested in a given issue.

A SPECIAL PROCEDURE IS FOLLOWED WHEN A BUDGET ACT IS TO BE PASSED. The relevant sections of the act are examined by committees competent in specific areas. Their opinions are forwarded to the Budget and Public Finance Committee, which prepares a report and a Senate draft opinion on the budget act. The committee may propose amendments to this act or they may accept its contents without proposing amendments.

FOLLOWING POLAND'S ACCESSION TO THE EUROPEAN UNION IN 2004, the Senate of the Republic of Poland set up the European Union Affairs Committee as a body competent to deal with matters associated with Poland's membership in the EU. Nowadays one of the main tasks of the European Union Affairs Committee is to scrutinize documents related to Poland's membership in the EU. The European Union Affairs Committee works together with industry-specific committees to prepare opinions on EU documents.

THE SENATE COMMITTEES MAY DRAFT THEIR OWN ACTS (legislation may likewise be initiated by a group of 10 senators). Any such drafts are examined by the competent committees and the Legislation Committee. The ultimate decision on submission of a given draft to the Sejm is taken by the Senate.

The committees are not only involved in legislative work, but also take part in topic-specific sessions and seminars to discuss issues connected with the objectives of their activities. In addition, they take position on issues which they consider important and communicate it to the relevant bodies or institutions.

THE SESSIONS OF THE COMMITTEES ARE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC, although in some cases they may decide to hold proceedings in camera. A committee may also hold a closed session. The committee sessions may be attended by deputies, representatives of the Council of Ministers, bodies of government administration, Members of the European Parliament, entities professionally engaged in lobbying activities, as well as experts, representatives of groups and organisations interested in matter that the committee is working on.

MINUTES AND VERBATIM RECORDS ARE PRODUCED FROM EVERY SESSION OF A SENATE COMMITTEE. Transcripts are available on the website of the Senate. At the end of their term of office, the committees draw up reports on their activities.

There are transmissions of current and former sessions of committees available on the Senate's website www.senat.gov.pl/transmisje



(photo by T. Ozdoba)