

NOTES ON THE SENATE



**SENATE
OF THE REPUBLIC
OF POLAND**

The Senate debating chamber

When the senators elected to the Senate in June 1989 in the first free elections for fifty years arrived in parliament, they had to be provided with a place where they could work. They were given the easternmost wing of the Sejm complex designed by Professor Bohdan Pniewski in late 1940s. However, it did not have a large room where the Senate could hold its debates, so the Senate met in alternation with the Sejm in the latter's debating chamber, and later – for more than a year and a half – in the Hall of Columns.

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General view of the current debating chamber of the Senate (photo by Tomasz Paczos)

In 1990, the architects Andrzej and Barbara Kaliszewski and Bohdan Napieralski presented a reconstruction design for the first floor of the Senate building. The building alteration work lasted 14 months. Its external elevations remained the same, because the architects did not want them to clash with the interior architecture of other parts of the building. They decided to use solutions in the spirit of Bohdan Pniewski's designs.

The Senate debating chamber

THE SENATE'S PRESENT DEBATING CHAMBER was created by joining three conference rooms, thus obtaining an area of 220 square metres. It was not an easy task to fit a chairman's table, a rostrum, 100 amphitheatre seats for the senators, and about 40 places for people taking part in the session as guests or for various official reasons into such a confined space. The chamber's designation created additional problems, given the shortage of space. A new plafond ceiling with a prominent semicircular cornice had to be constructed to neutralize the dimensions of the rectangular chamber, which was twice as long as it was broad. Most of the wiring for the lighting, air-conditioning and other installations was concealed behind the plafond. Fire regulations required a second evacuation route, so an additional staircase was built.

The colour scheme harmonizes with that of Professor Pniewski, used in all the Sejm interiors, with its dominant combination of white, black and grey. There are white volutes of Carrera marble at the entrance to the chamber, similar to the marble used by Pniewski.

During reconstruction, a metal curtain was fixed behind the chairperson's table to cover the windows looking at the park and the Vistula escarpment. It would be hard for senators to look for hours at the rostrum and the chairperson's table situated in front of windows, with direct sunlight shining in. Artificial light is also necessary for TV cameras that record sittings. Four mirrors with silvered candelabra are both of decorative and functional importance as they make the room seem more spacious. Behind one of them, there is a recording studio where sound technicians make sure that the sound system in the plenary room works properly.



Hall and staircase (photo by A. Iwaskiewicz, T. Wierzejski)

The Senate debating chamber

Over the chairperson's table, there is the emblem of the Republic of Poland with the curtain in the background. Both the emblem and the Marshal's Staff were designed by the same architects who designed the room and crafted by the Polish Guild of Artisans as a gift to the first democratically elected upper chamber of the parliament. Seats at the table are taken by the Marshal presiding over the sitting and secretaries of the Senate who help the Marshal by keeping the list of speakers and preparing minutes. In front of the Chairperson's table and the rostrum, there are seats for the officials of the Chancellery of the Senate who are responsible for the course of the sitting. These include the representatives of the Senate Sitting Unit, the IT Centre, the Legislative Office, and the Transcript Unit.

Due to the size of the room, the number of seats available for the representatives of the government, experts, journalists and the public is limited. They have a dozen of seats located in two corners of the plenary room at their disposal. There is also a special seat for the President of the Republic of Poland. It is easily recognisable as there is a national flag next to it and over the armchair you can see a decorative kilim with a silver eagle, whose design is inspired by the design used in the pre-war banner of the President of the Republic of Poland.

EACH SENATOR HAS ITS OWN PERMANENT SEAT with a plaque bearing the senator's first name and surname. Microphones are installed next to chamber desks so that senators can ask quick questions and speak directly from their seats. Modern technical equipment is used for voting purposes. Each senator has their own voting card. When inserted into the card slot, the voting card activates the voting system in the chamber desk. There are buttons for relevant voting options: for, against, abstained. There is no need to count the quorum, as the number of present senators is available at any time thanks to the electronic equipment. The results of voting are displayed on two screens above the door.

THE SURROUNDINGS OF THE PLENARY ROOM were also partially rebuilt. An impressive hall with a round staircase designed by Bohdan Pniewski remained untouched. During plenary sittings of the Senate, the hall serves as a lobby.

On the right-hand side of the hall, there is the Office and secretariat of the Marshal of the Senate and the room of the head of the Marshal's Office. There is a large reception room adjoining the debating chamber. On the left-hand side of the hall, there is a foyer with armchairs. During breaks in debates, senators can relax here, have a coffee, discuss different issues and meet journalists. Portraits of all the Senate Marshals since 1922 hang on the foyer walls.

You can leave the hall through a special room occupied by the employees of the Legislative Office and the Senate Proceedings Office and go down the staircase built after 1989 to the offices of the Chancellery of the Senate located on the lower floors of the building.



Voting cards
(photo by M. Józefaciuk)

Education, Promotion
and Publications Office

The Senate debating chamber

PLAN OF THE SENATE DEBATING CHAMBER

1. ROSTRUM
2. CHAIRPERSON'S TABLE
3. OFFICIALS OF THE CHANCELLERY OF THE SENATE
4. SEAT OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND
5. SENATORS' SEATS
6. SEATS FOR THE GOVERNMENT AND EXPERTS
7. SEATS FOR THE PUBLIC AND MEDIA
8. LEGISLATIVE OFFICE OF THE CHANCELLERY OF THE SENATE
9. OFFICIALS OF THE CHANCELLERY OF THE SENATE
10. SEATS FOR THE HEAD OF THE CHANCELLERY OF THE SENATE AND DIRECTORS OF OFFICES

