



CHAMBRE DES DÉPUTÉS GRAND-DUCHÉ DE LUXEMBOURG



**THE PARLIAMENT OF THE
GRAND DUCHY OF LUXEMBOURG**



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Mars Di Bartolomeo
Speaker of the Chamber of
Deputies

FOREWORD BY THE SPEAKER

Welcome to the Chamber of Deputies!

I would like to welcome you to the Chamber of Deputies in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

The “Chamber” is the single chamber parliament in Luxembourg. It was created as the first parliament in the Grand Duchy by the Constitution of 23 June 1848, under the reign of King Grand Duke Guillaume II.

Parliament is a central part of our democracy. Its members – the deputies – are elected directly by the people, making the “Chamber” the only constitutional body legitimised by the votes of the people. Its role and powers have evolved constantly over the course of decades. A democracy is not something that is guaranteed; the rights and powers that we often now take for granted are by no means assured either now or in the future.

The Chamber of Deputies has been located in this building since 1860.





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Over time, parliament has bought or leased an increasing number of buildings to house its administrative team, as well as the deputies and political colleagues.

The "Chamber" has also always ensured that it remains up-to-date with new technologies and media and is considered to be one of the most modern parliaments in Europe.

So what exactly happens here? How does the Chamber of Deputies work? How is a law created? Hopefully, the texts and images in this brochure will help answer these and any other questions you may have.

If you want to experience "live" policy-making, where major laws are created and our country's political, economic and social concerns are discussed, you are welcome to attend a public session and experience the debates in the plenary hall from the public gallery. You can also follow the discussions and day-to-day activity of parliament on our website www.chd.lu and our own television channel "Chamber TV", or read about it in the "compte rendu".

Parliament is always ready to listen to the citizens of this country and will do its best to answer your questions and problems. We believe dialogue with you, the people, is absolutely essential.

The "Chamber" is more than a political centre. It is a historical building, filled with history and stories. I hope that this brochure will allow you to obtain a better idea of this supreme democratic body.





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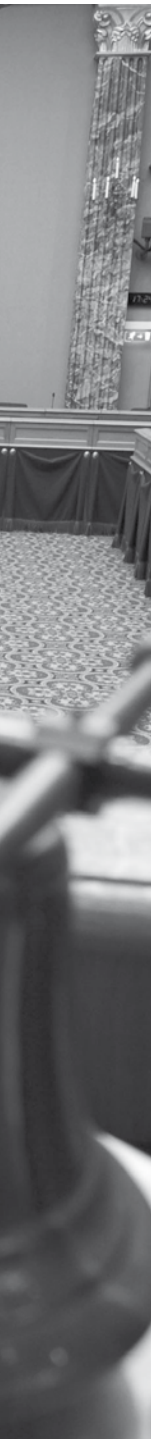
PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT IN LUXEMBOURG

The history of the Chamber of Deputies goes back to 1848. Although another parliamentary assembly existed in the Grand Duchy before that date, the Assembly of Estates, which met for the first time in 1841, two years after the constitution of Luxembourg as an independent and sovereign state, that assembly still only had very limited competences. Only sitting for about two weeks a year, it had no decision-making power, with its role limited to giving its opinion on bills of law from the Grand Duke.

Nevertheless, ceding to revolutionary pressure following the troubles in 1848, King Grand Duke Guillaume II that same year approved a constitutional amendment strengthening parliament. The members of the new Chamber of Deputies now had the opportunity to make proposals as to future laws, that right of legislative initiative conferring an active decision-making role on a parliament which, until then, had only a purely consultative function.

In 1856, King Grand Duke Guillaume III sought, successfully, to limit the power of parliament once more: the Chamber of Deputies returned to being an Assembly of Estates, establishing the power of the monarch behind a democratic visage.

This backward step was to last twelve years, until 1868: as the result of a new constitutional amendment, finally becoming the Chamber of Deputies, parliament was attributed more extensive powers.



It was not then until 1919 that the people of Luxembourg could be said to have democratic representation. In fact, male suffrage was until then reserved for citizens who paid a specific amount (the poll tax), thus excluding the majority of the population from any participation in political life.

In 1868, the poll tax was raised to 30 francs. In Luxembourg at that time, only 3,851 men paid that relatively high amount, so only 4.1% of the population had the right to vote. In 1893, the poll tax was reduced to 15 francs, increasing the number of voters to 13,394 (13.9% of the population of Luxembourg). In 1902, a further reduction to 10 francs increased the number of voters to 18,466, or 17.9% of the population.

It was only with the introduction in 1919 of universal suffrage, open to men and women, that the Chamber of Deputies was endowed with true democratic legitimacy.

In October 1919, the number of voters rose, for the country as a whole, to 126,194 citizens older than 21, the age required to stand for election at that time being 25 for all citizens. Although, on a European scale, the male population of Luxembourg had to wait a relatively long time before being granted universal suffrage, Luxembourg was still one of the first European countries to grant women the right to take part in elections.

At present the minimum age, both for the right to vote and for the right of eligibility, is 18. At the parliamentary elections on 20 October 2013, 239,668 Luxembourg citizens were called to the ballot box.

However, the introduction of universal suffrage was not the only change to make 1919 a key year in the history



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of parliamentary government in Luxembourg. In fact, two other decisive changes marked that year:

- Proportional representation allowed victory for political parties over estates now relegated to the past.
- The remuneration paid for carrying on a political activity also enabled members of lower social classes to commit themselves to the common good. ■







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THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The Chamber of Deputies has 60 members. In principle, they are elected every 5 years by secret ballot. Voting is obligatory.

At the legislative elections, the country is divided into four electoral constituencies, the law attributing to each constituency a certain number of seats.

The 60 mandates are divided as follows:

- Southern Constituency: 23 deputies
- Central Constituency: 21 deputies
- Northern Constituency: 9 deputies
- Eastern Constituency: 7 deputies

The number of candidates appearing on the lists presented by the parties in the different constituencies cannot exceed the number of mandates to be filled in each constituency. The voter has a number of votes equal to the number of mandates to be filled in their constituency. They can give their votes to candidates on one or more lists, with a maximum of two votes per candidate. ■







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THE PARLIAMENT BUILDING

Until 1860, the Assembly of Estates and then the Chamber of Deputies met in the “Hôtel du Gouvernement”, formerly the City Hall and now the Grand Ducal Palace.

During the Revolution, the seat of government and parliament was temporarily transferred, at the end of April 1848, to the primary school in Ettelbruck. After returning to the capital, the Chamber of Deputies sat first of all in the new City Hall on the Place Guillaume.

It was in 1860 that the present building became the seat of parliament. The plans, which date back to 1857, were drawn up by the civil engineer Antoine Hartmann. On land adjacent to the Grand Ducal Palace, the former St. Nicolas Church stood until 1779, its origins dating back to the 12th century.

The same piece of land then held the Maison Wirtgen, Maison Baustert, Maison Hernandez and Maison Heynen, demolished in 1858 to make room for the new parliament building.

Since 1860, the Chamber of Deputies has only been forced to leave the parliament building, on the Rue du Marché-aux-Herbes on two occasions:

- from 1940 to 1944, until after the dissolution of the Luxembourg parliament by the German occupiers, when the parliament building housed the “Außenstelle des Gaupropaganda-Amtes” (Provincial Propaganda Office);







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- and from 1997 to 1999, for major extension, conversion and renovation work on the building.

The renovation of the building situated on the “Rue du Marché-aux-Herbes” ended two decades of reflection on the possible transfer of the seat of parliament. In view of the lack of space, there were thoughts of a new building or conversion of another. The possibility to extend the parliament building in the direction of the Grand Ducal Palace as well as the decision to transfer the administrative offices of the parliament, situated until then in the parliament building, to other neighbouring buildings, convinced the deputies not to abandon their traditional place of work.

Today, the parliament building offers almost optimum working conditions. The technical equipment in the debating chamber is some of the most modern in Europe. Each deputy has a computer before him or her, giving access inter alia to parliamentary documents and email facilities. The debating chamber is moreover equipped with six remote-control cameras, allowing parliamentary debates to be broadcast on television (Chamber TV) and on the Internet (www.chd.lu). ■





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PARLIAMENTARY WORK

On the example of parliaments in a great many parliamentary democracies, the Chamber of Deputies has three principal competences:

- passing laws (legislative work),
- supervising government,
- making a contribution to the taking of political positions.

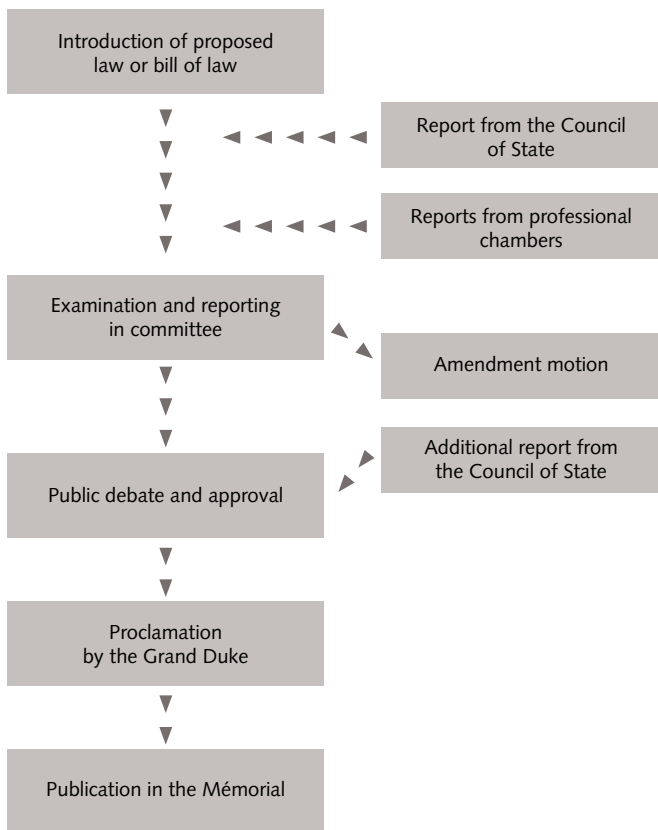
The legislative procedure

The Chamber of Deputies has a right of legislative initiative. When the initiative comes from parliament, this is a proposed law, and when it comes from the Grand Duke or government, it is a bill of law.

Once lodged, each bill / proposed law is first sent to the competent parliamentary committee where it is subject to in-depth debate, leading if necessary to amendments. At the close of its deliberations, the committee draws up a report containing the minutes and the conclusions of those deliberations.

At the same time as the deliberations in committee, the Council of State is called upon to give its opinion on the bill / proposed law placed before it. This institution, the members of which are not elected, but appointed by the Grand Duke, has the principal task of checking the conformity of new provisions to the constitution, to international treaties and conventions, and to general principles of law. The conclusions of that examination appear in a written opinion from the Council of State, which must have been given prior to the voting by deputies.

The Process for Passing Laws





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In certain fields, the opinion of relevant professional chambers is also required.

Although it might express fundamental reservations, the Council of State cannot block a law. At most it can delay its being passed by three months, by requiring parliament to proceed with a second constitutional vote.

Once the deliberations in committee have closed, the bill / proposed law may be placed on the agenda for plenary session. The date, time and duration of debates are fixed by the Conference of Presidents, namely the conference of presidents of the political groups under the chairmanship of the President of the Chamber.

All debates commence with an oral report from the parliamentary committee. The report given by the person appointed by the committee is followed by the debate proper, which as general rule ends with a speech by the appropriate member of government. The text is then put to a vote.

In order for it to enter into force as a law, the bill / proposed law, after being passed by parliament, must be signed by the Grand Duke and published in the Official Journal (the “Mémorial”).

The Grand Duke is entitled moreover to convene an extraordinary session of the Chamber of Deputies and may dissolve parliament on condition that there are elections within three months. ■









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SUPERVISION OF GOVERNMENT

The constitution gives the Chamber of Deputies various opportunities to influence government policy and to supervise the work of the executive body.

It is thus that deputies are entitled at any time to request explanations from the government or certain of its members. To that end, the internal rules of the Chamber of Deputies provide for various types of written and oral questions.

However, it is the annual budget debate which provides parliament with the most effective means of supervision. Rejection of the proposed budget would in fact paralyse the government. In addition, no fiscal legislation can be passed without the agreement of the Chamber. Since 1999, a parliamentary committee specially created for the purpose has supervised the execution of the budget, that is to say application of the policy of public expenditure. ■





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THE TAKING OF POLITICAL POSITIONS

The Chamber of Deputies regularly examines fundamental questions before proposing concrete legislative measures. These fundamental debates, which serve for the taking of political positions, may be organised either on the initiative of parliament itself (orientation debate) or on the request of the government (consultation debate). Often these fundamental debates can lead to the passing of a motion considered by parliament as an ensemble of claims concerning future government action in the fields in question.

Sessions and their preparation

The weekly sessions of parliament commence in principle on Tuesday afternoon at 14.30. On Wednesday and Thursday, the Chamber sits at 14.00. Nevertheless, it also happens that deputies sit on Wednesday and Thursday at 09.00 and, in case of urgency, on Monday and Friday. Although plenary or public sessions of the Chamber of Deputies are the more visible part of parliamentary work, they are nonetheless far from being the most important part of that work, the major proportion of which takes place in the parliamentary committees. It is there that preparations are made for debates and in-depth examination takes place and, if necessary, amendments are made to bills and proposed laws.

The ordinary session begins and ends each year on the second Tuesday in October, the date provided by the rules of procedure for the opening, by the Grand Duke or other person authorised so to do, of the new session after official closure of the previous session. In general, it is the Prime Minister who assumes this task on behalf of the Grand Duke. ■







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INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Outside its legislative functions, of supervision and taking positions at a national level, the Luxembourg Chamber of Deputies must assume a certain number of functions at an international level. Parliament thus maintains regular relations at an international level:

- by welcoming foreign visitors (members of parliament, representatives of governments, ambassadors, representatives of major international organisations);
- by visiting foreign parliaments;
- by the presence of some of its members in various international parliamentary institutions:
 - the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
 - the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)
 - the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)
 - the Parliamentary Assembly of French Speaking Communities (APF)
 - the Parliamentary Assembly - Union for Mediterranean (PA-UfM)
 - the Benelux Inter-Parliamentary Consultative Council
 - the Inter-Regional Parliamentary Council (IPC)
 - the Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC)
 - Inter-Parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security and the Common Security and Defence Policy
 - Inter-Parliamentary Conference on Economic and Financial Governance of the European Union







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INTERNAL ORGANISATION

At the opening of each session, deputies appoint a President from among their number, whose function is to represent the Chamber, to maintain order in the assembly, to ensure that regulations are observed, to judge the admissibility of texts, motions and other proposals, to chair sessions, to announce the results of votes and to give the decisions of the Chamber.

The Executive Office of the Chamber of Deputies, which consists of the President, three Vice-Presidents, a maximum of seven members and the general secretary (a member without the right to vote), represents the Chamber at national and international level and rules on questions of a financial and organisational nature concerning deputies, the parliament, its administration and its bodies.

The administration of parliament ensures the proper progress of parliamentary work. Administration activities include the printing and distribution of documents, studies and parliamentary documentation, committee secretariat, the organisation of public sessions, editing and publication of minutes of sessions, public relations, financial management and accounting, the order department, maintenance, the personnel department and so on.

The personnel of the parliamentary administration are bound by strict political neutrality. Outside administrative services, a deputy may also call on the services of members of staff or experts who are at their personal disposal or at the disposal of their political group. The status of political group is granted to parties represented by at least five deputies. ■





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INFORMATION

Parliament is an open institution. On behalf of citizens, it takes decisions obligatory to all, which gives the population the right to be adequately informed about the activities of parliament.

The Chamber of Deputies calls upon various media in responding to its duty to provide information:

- Regular minutes of public sessions containing a full account of all debates, a summary of new laws, questions to government and answers from the latter, as well as other information concerning the Chamber, are distributed free of charge to the population in the form of supplements to daily newspapers.
- The parliamentary television channel, "Chamber TV", provides a full live broadcast of all plenary sessions and a weekly news magazine with reports and interviews ("Chamber Aktuell").
- The Internet site of the Chamber of Deputies, www.chd.lu, offers a multitude of information on the activities of parliament and gives access to the principal parliamentary documents. Parliament is also on Facebook and Twitter.
- Additional information appears in the parliamentary activity report as well as various volumes and brochures dedicated to its organisation and its history. ■

LIST OF PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES

Executive

Conference of Presidents

Regulatory Committees

Accounts Committee

Parliamentary Committee on Control of the State Information Service

Petitions Committee

Regulations Committee

Permanent Committees

Foreign and European Affairs, Defence, Foreign Aid and Immigration

Home Affairs

Agriculture, Viticulture, Rural Development and Consumer Protection

Control of Budget Execution

Culture

Sustainable Development

Economy

Education, Childhood and Youth

Higher Education, Research, Media, Communications and Aerospace

Environment

Family and Integration

Finance and the Budget

Civil Service and Administrative Reform

Public Authority

Institutions and Constitutional Review

Justice

Housing

Health, Equality of Opportunity and Sport

Work, Employment and Social Security



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