



STORTINGET

The Storting and Democracy

ENGLISH

Contents

4	“The people exercise the Legislative Power through the Storting”
7	From rural assembly to Storting
13	The Norwegian Constitution
18	Parliamentary elections
21	The Storting’s consideration of legislation
24	The budget process in the Storting
29	The supervisory authority of the Storting
33	The Storting at work
40	Glossary
44	Visiting the Storting



**“The people exercise
the Legislative
Power through
the Storting”**



The Constitution of 1814 separated power between the executive branch (the King); the legislative, budgetary and supervisory branch (the Storting); and the judicial branch (the courts).

For most Norwegians, the word Storting is loaded with meaning. People associate it with many different things: the distinctive building at Løvebakken, the Constitution, the parliamentary system, the assembly of elected representatives, laws and budgets, Question Time, political debates and TV transmissions, the system of government, as well as social studies classes at school.

The purpose of this booklet is to provide a broad presentation of our Parliament. Our democracy builds upon social participation by young and old alike. It is essential that we raise awareness of our democratic system of government so that it endures in the future.

The Storting Chamber. The MPs are seated in a fan form by constituency. The inner row is for the Government. Below the painting "Eidsvold 1814" we find the President's podium and the rostrum, with the Press Box on the right and the Diplomats' Box on the left.



Med Guds Gåde
Sveriges, Hollens och Wendes
Könige
Schwinge, till Herrige,
Merlin till Schleswig Holl.
Kein, Stormarn och Dittmarren

Erhelve till Wendenburg och Detinshorst.
Vore weterligt: att då Wi och den Stormagtigste
örne Furst och Herre, Herr Frederik II, War
skelige Bröder och Frände, Dannemarks,
iges, Wendes och Göttes Konung, Hertig
Schleswig Hollstein, Stormarn, Dittmarren.



From rural assembly to Storting

The Storting, Norway's Parliament, was constituted at Eidsvoll in 1814, but its roots are far older.

Even before recorded history began in Scandinavia (around 800 AD), free men met in alltings (common assemblies) in the various districts scattered around the country. These alltings, or assemblies, later acquired important functions in relations between the King and the common people.

When Norway was united as a kingdom (900–1030 AD), the first lagtings were constituted as superior regional assemblies. These were representative assemblies at which delegates from the various districts in each region met to award legal judgments and pass laws. It was at specific regional assemblies that a pretender to the throne was customarily acclaimed king. Thus, from early times, the King received his lawful power from the people.

The ancient regional assemblies, Frostating, Gulating and Eidsivating, were eventually joined into a single jurisdiction, and King Magnus Lagabøte (the Lawmender) (1263–80) had the existing body of law put into writing. This compilation of codified law (1274), which applied throughout the realm, was exceptional for its time, and remained

in force until Frederik III, king of the Danish-Norwegian union, promulgated absolute monarchy in 1660. This was codified in the King Act of 1665, which functioned as the constitution of the Union of Denmark–Norway until 1814.

In 1807, Sweden, Denmark and Norway were swept up into the Napoleonic Wars, which raged in full force on the Continent, with Denmark-Norway and Sweden on opposite sides of the conflict. Napoleon's defeat in Russia in 1812 was the beginning of the end for the emperor and for the Union of Denmark-Norway.

Sweden sided with Napoleon's adversaries, and the Great Powers promised that the heir to the Swedish throne, Karl Johan, would be given Norway if he joined them in subduing France. Following the decisive victory over Napoleon at the Battle of Leipzig in October 1813, Karl Johan hurried north to inflict a final defeat on Denmark. Frederik VI of Denmark yielded quickly and on 14 January 1814 he signed the Treaty of Kiel, ceding Norway to the King of Sweden.



Oscar Wergeland (1844–1910): Eidsvoll 1814, oil painting on canvas, 285 x 400 cm. The painting hangs behind the President's podium in the Storting Chamber.

The Danish Crown Prince Christian Frederik, who came to Norway in May 1813 as vice-regent, played a prominent role in the drama which subsequently unfolded in 1814. He refused to accept the Treaty of Kiel, and on 16 February 1814, called together the most influential men in Norway to an assembly, the purpose of which was to discuss Norway's future. At this assembly, Christian Frederik was dissuaded from his original intention to assert his hereditary title to the throne of Norway and have himself acclaimed king. The delegates called for a liberal constitution and a new king to be chosen by the people. They decided that the people should elect deputies to a constituent parliament. The ideal of the sovereignty of the people had prevailed.

Each parish would appoint electors who would elect delegates to the constituent assembly. Christian Frederik was to govern the country for the time being as regent.

THE EIDSVOLL CONVENTION

Of the 112 representatives to the Constituent Assembly at Eidsvoll, 25 represented the towns, 33 represented the army and navy, and 54 represented the rural districts (called *amts*). They included 37 land-owning farmers, 13 merchants, 5 industrialists and 57 government officials. Owing to its remoteness and the shortness of time, northern Norway was not represented. It was a young assembly that met at Eidsvoll; the average age was just over 42. The youngest was 17 years old.

When the Eidsvoll Convention assembled, a number of drafts of the Constitution had been made. The draft of Christian Magnus Falsen and Johan Gunder Adler is regarded as the most important. A Constitutional Committee with fifteen members was charged with making the final draft of Norway's future constitution. On 16 April, the main principles were discussed and between 19 April and 11 May the final text of the Constitution was drafted.



The Assembly was divided into two main factions. The larger of the two groups, referred to as the independence party or “Prince Party” by its opponents, consisted of approximately 80 members in favour of full Norwegian independence. The smaller group, which was referred to as the unionist party or “Swedish Party”, consisted of approximately 30 members who considered that Norwegian independence was unrealistic, and were therefore unwilling to take a stand until they were convinced that Norway was not entirely alone.

On 17 May, a final draft of the Constitution was signed. On the same day, Christian Frederik was unanimously elected King of a free, sovereign and independent Norway. The Constituent Assembly held its last meeting 20 May, and in closing, all the delegates joined hands and raised their voices with the cry, “United and faithful until the Mountains of Dovre should fall!”. With this, Norway had established its Constitution and founded its Parliament, the Storting.

THE CONSTITUTION OF 17 MAY 1814

The main principles of the Constitution were founded, for the most part, on the same ideals expressed in the American Declaration of Independence (1776) and Constitution (1787) and the constitutions of the French Republic (1791, 1793 and 1795): sovereignty of the people, separation of powers and civil rights.

Sovereignty of the people

Sovereignty of the people entails that the power is vested in the people, who thereby have the right to rule themselves. The people elect representatives to a national assembly which is entrusted, among other things, with enacting the laws held to be in force in that society.

Detail from the Constitution of 17th May 1814: Signed and sealed by the Eidsvoll Men. The Constitution is kept in the Storting's archives.

Kongeriget Norges Grundlov,

givet

i Rigsforsamlingen paa Eidsvold
den 17^{de} Mai 1814 og nu, i Anledning
af Norges og Sveriges Rigers Forening,
nærmere bestemt i Norges overordnede
Storting i Christiania ^{og antagen} den 4^{de} Novbr

1814.

Separation of powers

Separation of powers involves a division between the legislative, executive and judicial powers, which are vested respectively in the Storting, the King and the courts. The power of the State is divided between several branches of government, which are independent of each other and act as checks and balances on each other. The aim of this principle is to prevent the concentration and abuse of power.

The “innate and inalienable” rights of citizens

The “innate and inalienable” rights of citizens are assured. The Constitution affirmed the citizens’ right to freedom of speech, freedom of trade and the rule of law. Freedom of worship was also adopted as a principle for the Constitution, but was not included in any of its articles. Implementation of these rights occurred only gradually.

THE CONSTITUTION OF 4 NOVEMBER 1814

In autumn 1814, Norway yielded to pressure from the Great Powers to accept union with Sweden. The two countries would share a king and thus have joint foreign policy, but were otherwise to have separate governing bodies and full internal independence. In article 1 of the revised Constitution of 4 November 1814 it was established that “The Kingdom of Norway is a free, independent, indivisible and inalienable Realm united with Sweden under one King”. The Union was dissolved in 1905.



The Norwegian Constitution

The fundamental rules for how a state is to be governed form the country's constitution. An important element of our constitution is the written Constitution, as are legal rules that are a result of many years of practice (customary law).

THE CONSTITUTION

The Constitution distributes responsibilities and power between the different branches of the state and defines the limits of their power. The Norwegian Constitution is founded on democracy. In practice, this functions as representative democracy. The power to deal with individual matters and to make decisions is entrusted to elected representatives.

The Constitution as we know it today is based on a number of principles that were laid down in the original Constitution of 1814: sovereignty of the people, separation of powers and human rights.

The Constitution divides the power into three branches, establishing that

1. legislative, budgetary and supervisory power is vested in the Storting.
2. executive power is vested in the King (in reality the Government), whose responsibility it is to ensure that decisions are put into effect.
3. judicial power is vested in the courts. The highest judicial body is the Supreme Court.

Through the Storting, it is the people who govern the country, pass legislation, grant money, impose taxes and supervise the Government (and through this the public administration).

In order to ensure the democratic rights of the citizens, some very important rules of law have been laid down in the Constitution.

These rules state, for example, that:

- no-one may be convicted except according to the law, and no-one may be punished except after a court judgment
- there shall be freedom of the press and freedom of speech in Norway
- there shall be freedom of worship
- no-one shall surrender his property without full compensation
- all people in Norway have a right to work and to co-determination in the workplace
- the state has a special responsibility for the Sami people



Prime minister Jonas Gahr Støre and his cabinet at Slottsplassen in October 2021.

The Constitution has been changed several times by amendments to articles and the addition of new provisions.

A comprehensive language revision of the Constitution was carried out in 1903. Before and after this revision, existing articles had been amended and new articles written in the language form used in the Constitution at the time. A second full language revision was adopted in 2014. Based on prevailing spelling rules, this gave us equal language versions of the Constitution in the two official forms of Norwegian, bokmål and nynorsk. During the same session of the Storting, it was agreed to incorporate a number of provisions on human rights into the Constitution.

Article 121 of the Constitution provides that proposed amendments to the Constitution must be submitted during the first three years of an electoral term, and must be considered during the first, second or third year of the following term. This means there will always be a parliamentary election between the submission of a proposed amendment and the decision as to whether or not to adopt it. This allows the electorate to make its opinions known.

A two-thirds majority is required to adopt an amendment to the Constitution, and at least two-thirds of the Members must be present in the Chamber to vote on any constitutional matter.



PARLIAMENTARIANISM

Parliamentarism is a system of government that makes the executive (the Government) accountable to the parliament (the Storting). The Government is dependent on having the confidence of the Storting.

The Constitution states that the King himself chooses his Council (the Government). However, owing to parliamentarism, it is in reality the people, by means of a parliamentary election, who indirectly decide which political parties shall govern. The Storting does not itself appoint the members of a new Government, but parliamentarism entails that the Government must have the confidence of the majority in the Storting in order to be able to function. If the Storting expresses a lack of confidence in the Gov-

ernment, the Government must resign and a new Government is formed.

Since the time it achieved its breakthrough in 1884 after a long and bitter political conflict during the 1870s and the first part of the 1880s, parliamentarism was an unwritten practice that worked as a constitutional custom. It wasn't until 20 February 2007 that parliamentarism was written into the Constitution. Article 15 now reads:

“Any person who holds a seat in the Council of State has the duty to submit his application to resign once the Storting has passed a vote of no confidence against that Member of the Council of State or against the Council of State as a whole.”



PARLIAMENTARIANISM IN PRACTICE

Since 1884, parliamentarianism has been the fundamental principle that guides the relationship between the Storting and the Government in Norway.

There have been a number of motions of no confidence in the Storting. However, they are rarely adopted. Since 1905, only two Governments have been brought down by motions of no confidence (in 1928 and in 1963).

A Government may also call for a vote of confidence and, in doing so, threaten to step down if the Storting does not accept its proposal on a specific issue. When a Government calls a vote of confidence, it puts pressure on the Storting and risks the possibility of having to resign in order to win the Storting's support for an issue or prevent a motion from being adopted. This has happened on a number of occasions.

In practice, a Government also resigns following defeat in a parliamentary election, i.e. if the parliamentary majority is changed as a result of the election, thereby creating a parliamentary basis for a new Government. It has become common practice for the Government not to submit its resignation until after the Speech from the Throne has been read and the Fiscal Budget has been submitted.

There are other circumstances that may result in a Government's resignation. There may be internal political disagreements between coalition partners, a Prime Minister may wish to step down or a party may want to make changes in its leadership. Changes of Government have also been brought about by the illness or death of a Prime Minister. Owing to the close association between the Government and the Prime Minister, a Prime Minister's resignation involves the resignation of the whole Government.



Government ministers and
members of Parliament during
a debate in the Storting Chamber.



Parliamentary elections

“Those entitled to vote are Norwegian citizens, men and women, who, at the latest in the year when the election is held, have completed their 18th year.” (Article 50 of the Constitution)



Every fourth year, in September, 169 Members are elected to the Storting. A new election cannot be called until the end of an electoral term. In Norway there is universal suffrage. All Norwegian subjects who are over the age of 18 by the end of the election year have the right to vote. All who are entitled to vote and who have resided in Norway for at least ten years are eligible to stand for election as Members of the Storting (except, among others, Supreme Court judges and employees of the government ministries and the Foreign Service).

In order to vote, it is necessary to be listed in the electoral register. Voting is by secret ballot for political parties. The candidates on the lists of the various parties are decided by the parties' nomination meetings.

Norway has a system of proportional representation. This means that the number of Members of each party in the Storting is determined by the proportion of votes cast for the respective party in the election. Norway is divided into 19 constituencies. The size and population of the 19 districts determines the number of seats each one has in the Storting. In addition to the 150 ordinary seats, there are 19 at-large seats assigned to even out discrepancies between the number of votes received and the number of seats in the Storting.

The Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation is responsible for organizing and implementing parliamentary elections in Norway.

Party leaders meet for a panel debate in the Central Hall on election night after the results are ready.



NORGES LOVER
1687–2016

The Storting's consideration of legislation

The Storting passes, amends and repeals the statutes by which society is ruled. The provision in the Constitution that it is the people who exercise the legislative power really means that it is the elected representatives of the people, the Members of the Storting, who exercise such power.

From 1814 to 2009, the Storting dealt with legislation in two chambers – the Odelsting and the Lagting. When a new Storting assembled after an election, one quarter of the Members were elected to serve as members of the Lagting.

On 20 February 2007, the Storting agreed – with one vote against – to formally bring the system of the Odelsting and Lagting to an end. This resulted in a new legislative procedure, with two separate readings in the Storting as a whole.

THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

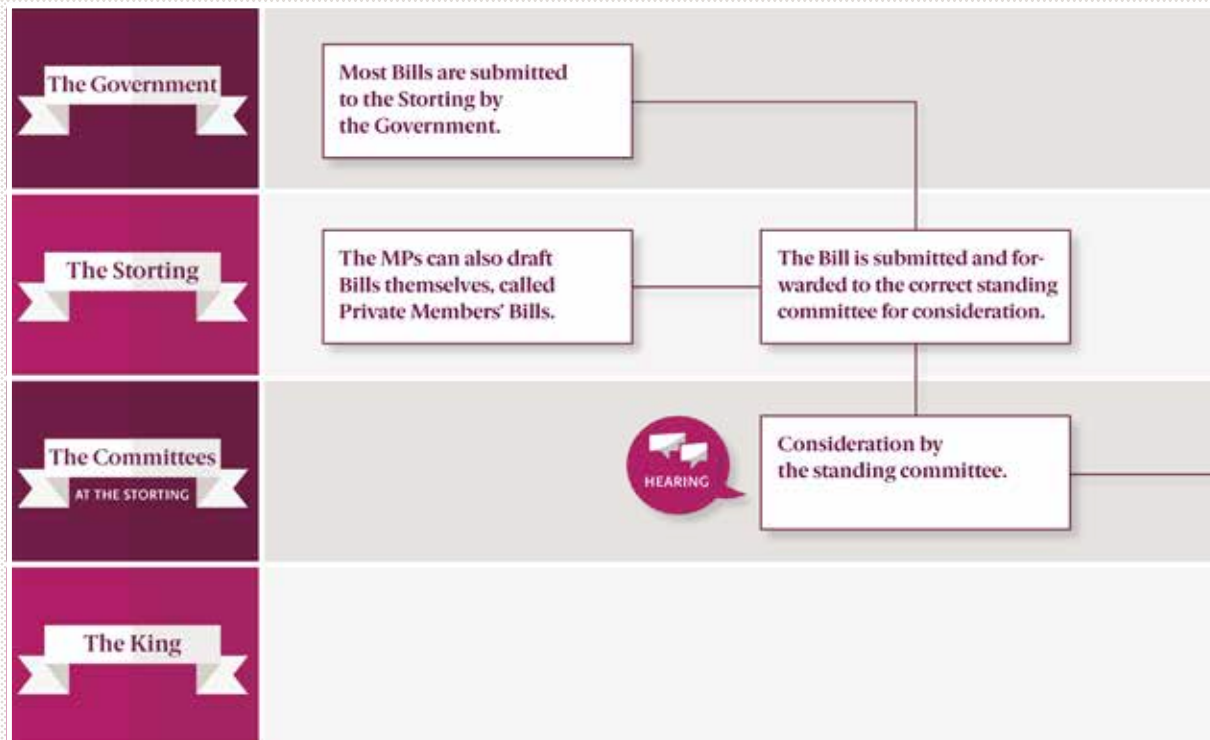
Article 76 of the Constitution governs the way in which laws are considered in the Storting: “Every Bill shall first be proposed in the Storting, either by one of its own Members, or by the Government through a Member of the Council of State.”

PREPARATION

A Bill introduced by the Government in the form of a Proposition to the Storting is the product of thorough preparatory work. In the case of a major item of legislation or an extensive revision of an existing law, the Government generally appoints an expert committee or commission. There are also more or less permanent law committees, such as the Penal Code Council.

Such an expert committee usually consists of lawyers, civil servants and spokespeople for the affected parties. The committee submits a report – a draft Bill – to the ministry responsible for the Bill.

LEGISLATION



PROPOSITION TO THE STORTING (BILL)

The Ministry usually sends the Bill out for comment – so-called hearings. In this way, other affected government bodies, organizations, institutions and associations are given the opportunity to state their opinions. When comments from the consultation round have been received, the Ministry draws up a draft Proposition to the Storting (a Bill) with a draft enactment of a Bill. The Proposition is presented to the King in Council. If it is approved there, the Proposition is sent to the Storting as a whole. Under the new system, a Bill may contain both a draft enactment of a Bill and a draft recommendation or proposal for another kind of resolution, such as an appropriations resolution.

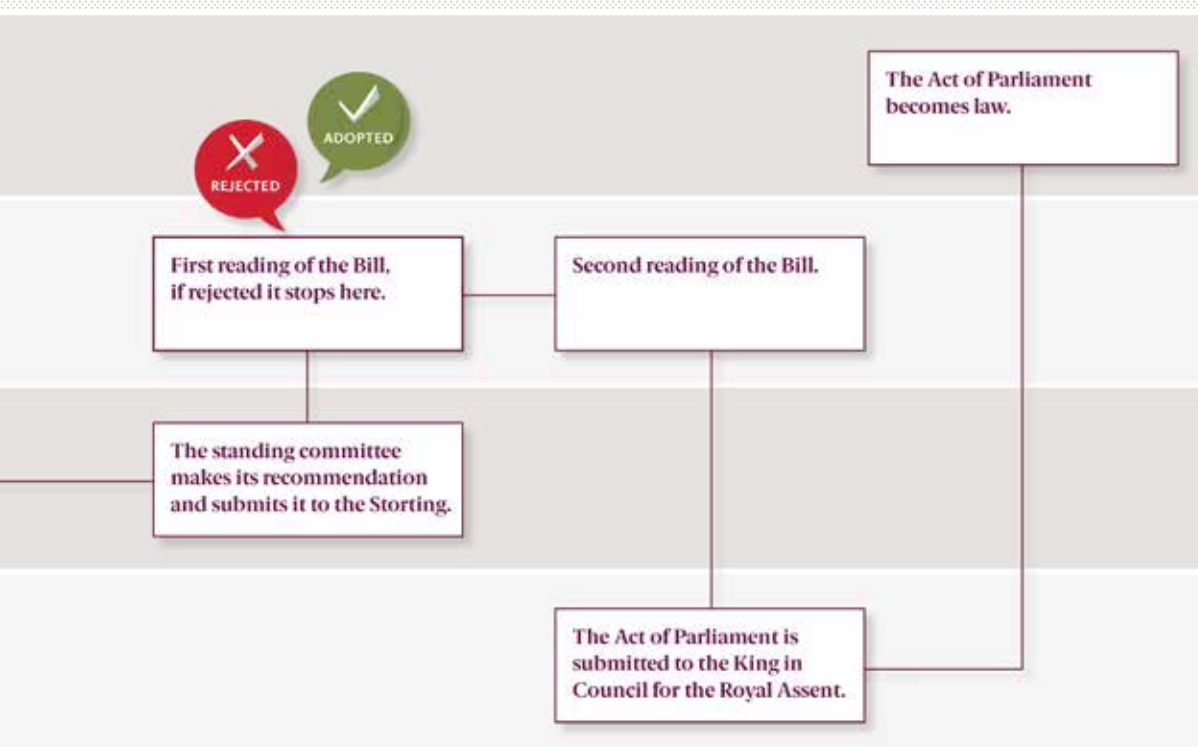
THE COMMITTEE STAGE

After the Bill has been introduced, it is sent to one of the Storting's standing committees. The committee considers the Bill in detail and submits its recommendation with a proposed decision to the Storting. If the Proposition contains both a Bill and another proposal, the committee must submit two recommendations – one for the enactment of the Bill and one for the resolution of the Storting.

CONSIDERATION IN THE STORTING AS A WHOLE

The first time the Bill is dealt with in the Chamber is called the first reading. The recommendation from the committee is debated, amendments are proposed and voted on, and eventually a decision is made. The decision of the first reading is not final. However, a Bill that is dismissed is dropped if it is rejected after the first reading.

If the Bill passes the first reading, there must then be an interval of at least three days before the Storting meets again to debate the Bill and vote for a second time – what



we call the second reading. This time it is the decision from the first reading that is up for debate. If the Bill is adopted by the Storting a second time, it has reached the end of the legislative process in the Storting. It is then sent to the King in Council to receive the Royal Assent.

If, however, during the second reading, the Storting comes to a different conclusion to the first reading, amendments to the draft enactment of the Bill are adopted. In this case, the Storting will meet for a third reading. The Storting can now adopt the amendments made during the second reading, and the Bill is then passed complete with these amendments. The Storting may also decide to dismiss the matter.

When an Act has received the Royal Assent, it is published in the Norwegian Law Gazette.

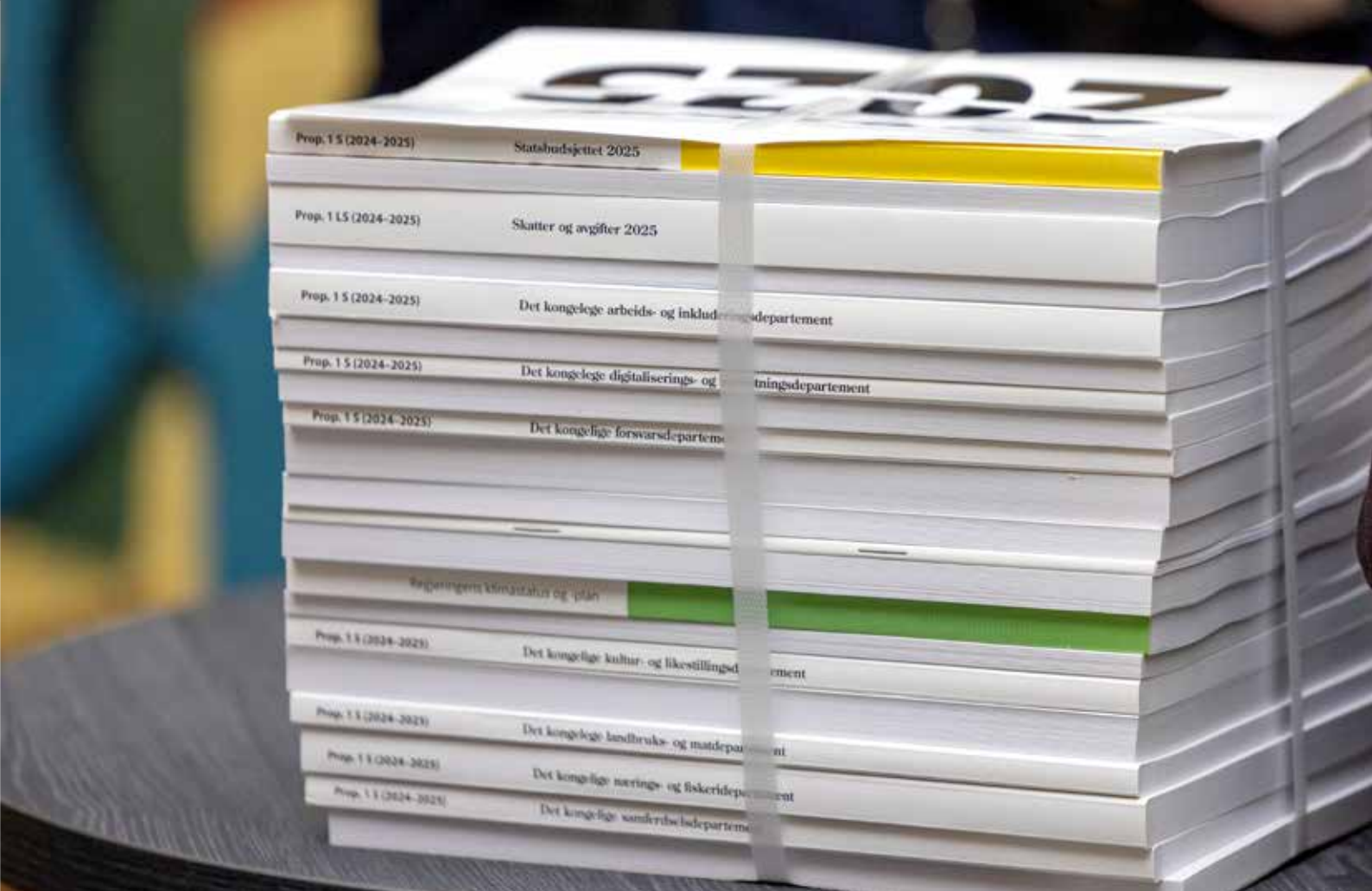
When the King has signed the Act and the Prime Minister has countersigned, it becomes Norwegian law from the date stated in the Act or decided by the Government.

The Constitution states that the legislative power is exercised through the Storting. In practice, however, the Storting delegates much of its power to the Government and public administration. This is done by adopting framework Acts or enabling Acts that give the Government or public administration the authority to issue further provisions, rules and regulations. It is calculated that there are approximately three times as many regulations as Acts.



The budget process in the Storting

According to the Constitution, it is the Storting that decides over the finances of the state, both revenue and expenditure. Since the National Insurance Act entered into force in 1967, the Budget has also included the revenue and expenditure that falls within the scope of the social security schemes. It is the Storting that allocates money, i.e. makes money available to the executive power, the Government. Not only does the Storting permit that money be used for specific purposes; it also has the right to order this.



PROPOSITION TO THE STORTING (DRAFT RESOLUTION)

When the Storting assembles in the autumn, the Fiscal Budget is always the first major item of business to be dealt with, and the budget process takes up most of the autumn session. The Fiscal Budget is perhaps the most important policy instrument the Storting and the Government have and, by means of the Budget, the framework is established for state activities during the coming years. The Government's budget proposals are presented in a Proposition to the Storting

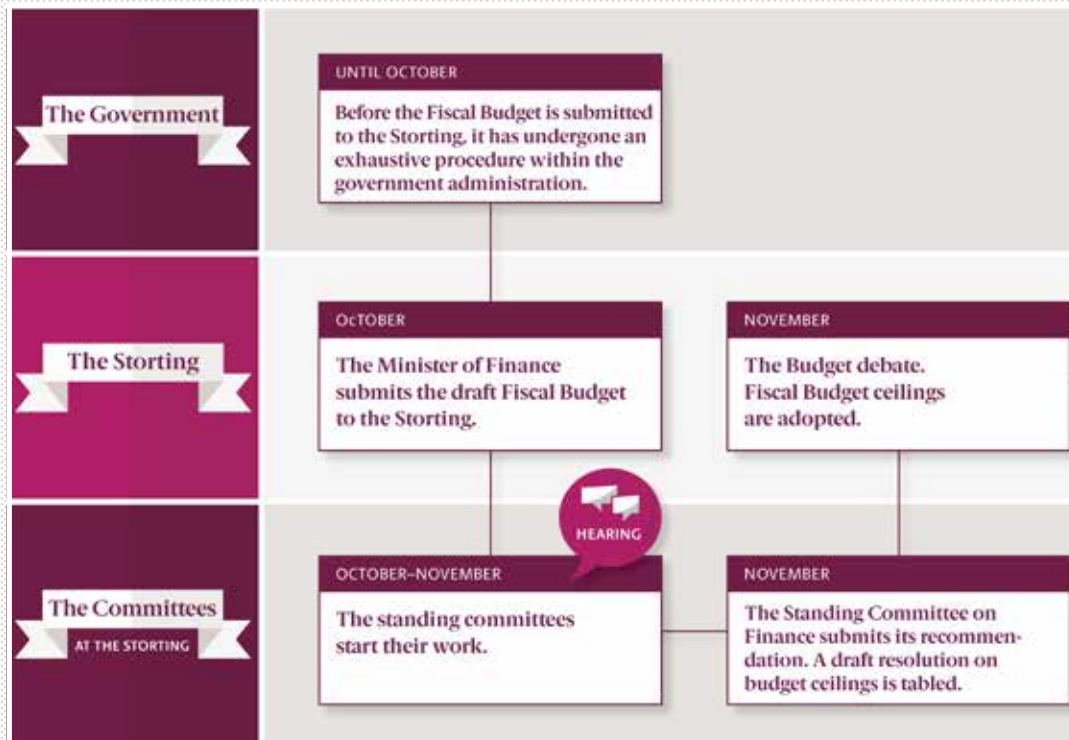
The Fiscal Budget must be submitted within six days of the opening of the Storting. The Minister of Finance then makes the Budget Statement, which gives an account of the challenges facing the country and the priorities and measures the Government will take to meet these challenges. The Budget Statement forms part of the basis of the subsequent Budget Debate.

WORK ON THE FISCAL BUDGET

On the basis of the Government's draft Fiscal Budget, the parliamentary party groups normally prepare their own alternative budgets, which form the basis of their views on the distribution between the various expenditure areas. Before the commencement of negotiations in the Standing Committee on Finance, all of the parties inform the Committee of their main standpoints.

The government's draft fiscal budget for 2025.

THE BUDGET PROCESS



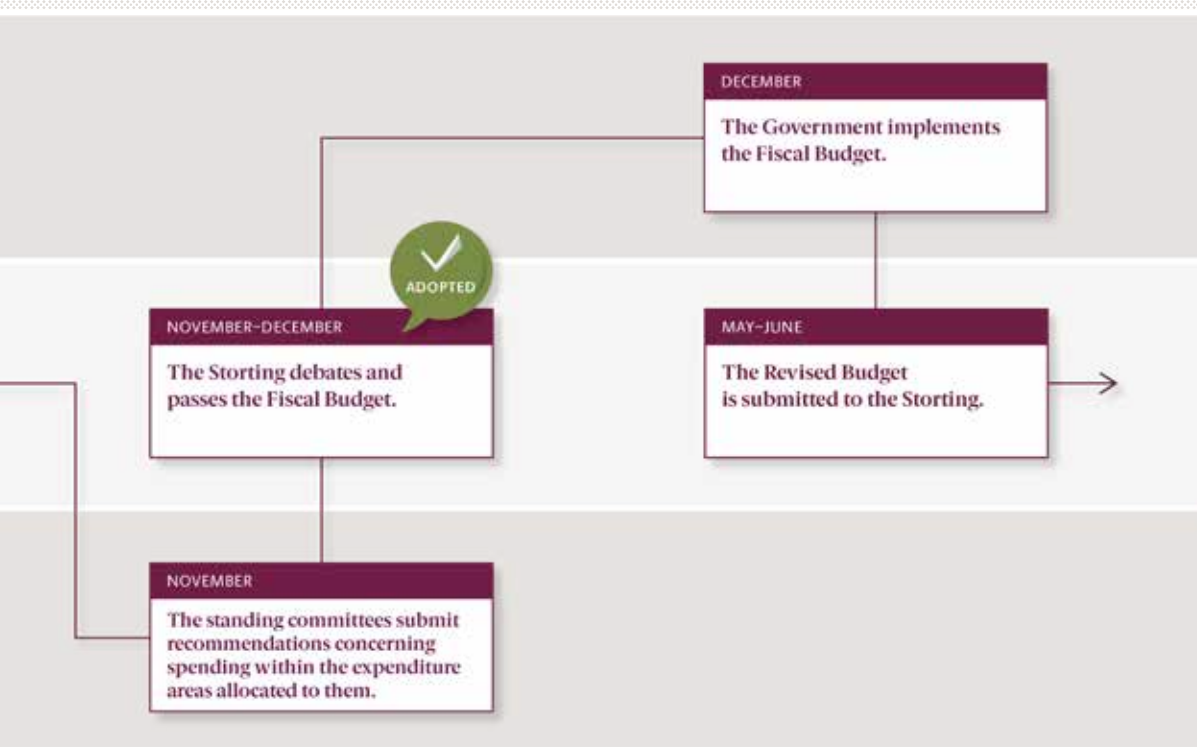
In the Storting, it is the Presidium that allocates the various budget chapters to the Standing Committees. The recommendation concerning this distribution is considered and adopted by the Storting as a whole. After the committee chair has been given the opportunity to state his or her views, the Presidium also sets the time limits for submission of budget recommendations by the committees.

The budget proceedings in the Storting are coordinated by the Standing Committee on Finance, which by 20 November at the latest submits a recommendation concerning the National Budget and Fiscal Budgets including National Insurance, with a proposed resolution on budget ceilings. The recommendation also includes the different parties' proposed resolutions on budget ceilings, and is referred to as the Budget Recommendation. At the same time, the committee submits a recommendation concerning taxes and revenue items.

The Storting must deal with these recommendations within one week. This is followed by the annual Budget Debate at the end of November. From a political point of view, this is one of the Storting's most important debates.

The debate is concluded by a vote on the proposals submitted in the budget recommendations. The amounts for all the separate expenditure areas are fixed collectively in a single resolution. The Storting's resolution on budget ceilings is binding for the subsequent budget proceedings.

In the period that follows, the standing committees submit recommendations concerning appropriations within the expenditure areas allocated to them, which shall include all chapters and items within each separate expenditure area. The standing committees may only make reallocations within the ceilings decided. This means that increases in expenditure must be matched by decreases in expenditure or by increases in revenue.



The standing committees' budget recommendations must be considered by the Storting by 15 December at the latest, culminating in the Storting's final Budget Resolution. The amounts for all the separate items within an expenditure area are fixed collectively in a single resolution.

The period during the budget proceedings is often extremely hectic. The Government's proposal and the Storting's resolution normally differ financially by less than one per cent. The signals given by the Storting by means of its comments and priorities are of political importance, since they may influence subsequent Budgets.

The Storting makes many of its appropriations in the form of block grants, so it is the Government that makes the final decisions about how the funds are to be applied. When passed, the Fiscal Budget is published on the parliamentary website.

THE REVISED NATIONAL BUDGET

Budget amendments made during the course of the year may be submitted by the Government as propositions. A Royal Aggregate Budget Proposition concerning amendments to all the separate budgets of the individual ministries must be submitted by 15 May during the financial year concerned, in connection with the submission of the Report to the Storting concerning the Revised National Budget. The Standing Committee on Finance submits recommendations concerning such amendments by the second Friday in June at the latest. These are considered by the Storting, which adopts the Revised Budget by the end of the spring session.



The supervisory authority of the Storting

The third main function of the Storting is to supervise the Government and the public administration. The Storting is responsible for ensuring that the Government implements the decisions made by the Storting and for checking that the various central government agencies adhere to the guidelines drawn up by the Storting.

The Constitution assigns a number of supervisory functions to the Storting, including:

- examining the Records of the Council of State (the decisions taken in Council)
- reviewing treaties concluded with foreign powers
- auditing the State Accounts

The breakthrough for parliamentarianism in 1884 and subsequent developments have given the Storting a quite different and much broader basis for controlling the various aspects of the Government's policy. The substantial control which the Storting exercises over the public administration is often based on information communicated through the mass media.

DEBATES

Parliamentary debates provide the Storting with opportunities to scrutinize and evaluate

government policies. The debates are generally open to the public. The subject of debates is often business introduced by the Government. Each year, the debate on the Speech from the Throne inaugurates the new session of the Storting. In many ways, this debate has evolved into an examination and discussion of the Government's political programme, essentially the same function as the Budget Debate in respect of the Government's economic policy. Numerous reports on various aspects of government policy are presented and debated throughout the year.

QUESTIONS AND INTERPELLATIONS

Questions and interpellations addressed to the members of the Government provide an opportunity for individual Members to obtain information on specific matters and to ascertain the views of the ministers on specific political issues. There are several procedures for asking questions.

Question Time is held nearly every week while the Storting is in session. During the first part of Question Time, government ministers reply directly to spoken questions from Members in what is known as oral Question Time. These questions are not submitted in advance, though Members are informed ahead of time which ministers will be attending. The Prime Minister attends once a month.

Oral Question Time is immediately followed by ordinary Question Time. Members who wish to ask ministers questions must submit their questions in writing to the Presidium by the previous Thursday at the latest. Questions often concern matters originating in local politics and/or that have been focused on by the mass media.

A Member may also submit questions for written reply, which must be answered by the minister within six working days.

Interpellations are a more formal way of submitting questions. They generally deal with matters of greater scope and political importance, and often lead to debates. The Prime Minister or the minister concerned notifies the President in writing when he or she intends to answer the interpellation. The answer must come without undue delay, and no later than one month after the interpellation has been submitted.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SCRUTINY AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

The Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs is one of the Storting's 12 permanent committees. It reviews and makes recommendations to the Storting on such matters as the Records of the Council of State.

It also reviews the reports of the Office of the Auditor General and the Government's

annual report on the follow-up of decisions of the Storting that contain petitions to the Government, and on consideration of Private Member's Motions submitted by the Storting to the Government for investigation and comment. The Committee also deals with constitutional matters, appropriations for the Storting, election legislation, and reports from the Parliamentary Ombudsman and from the Storting's Parliamentary Intelligence Oversight Committee.

This Committee is further empowered to conduct whatever investigations into the public administration it may find necessary for the exercise of the Storting's control over the public administration. This step may only be taken after a particular minister has been notified and requested to submit the required information. The backing of one third of the Committee's members only is sufficient for such a decision to be made.

THE OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL

The purpose of the Office of the Auditor General (Riksrevisjonen) is, by means of audits and controls, to ensure that the State assets are utilized and managed according to sound financial principles and in keeping with the decisions and intentions of the Storting.

The Office of the Auditor General is independent of the Government and other administrative bodies and is the Storting's most important supervisory body. The five national auditors appointed by the Storting jointly head the Office of the Auditor General.

Each year the Office of the Auditor General audits the central government accounts and the accounts relating to the administration of Svalbard. These accounts show how the Government and ministries have used state funds.



THE PARLIAMENTARY OMBUDSMAN

The Parliamentary Ombudsman is appointed by the Storting for a term of four years from 1 January of the year following a parliamentary election. The duty of the Ombudsman is to ensure that individuals do not suffer injustice at the hands of the public administration.

A court action is costly and time-consuming. By taking a complaint to the Ombudsman, an aggrieved person may obtain a decision through a much easier process. The Ombudsman examines the case and makes a statement. If he finds that a government action or decision is in violation of the law or is manifestly unreasonable, the agency in question will normally reconsider the matter and follow the recommendation of the Ombudsman.

The Storting has also appointed ombudsmen for the armed forces.

REVIEW OF TREATIES AND COOPERATION AGREEMENTS

Each year, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs communicates to the Storting all the treaties and agreements concluded with foreign powers. The Standing Committee on Foreign Af-

fairs and Defence examines these and makes a recommendation to the Storting. This gives the Storting considerable influence on the conduct of foreign affairs and the ratification of treaties.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

In certain cases, a standing committee may find it appropriate to subject a matter to a public scrutiny hearing. Special considerations apply in scrutiny matters where there is a suspicion of reproachable conditions or negligence in government or administration. The purpose is often to establish the responsibilities of ministers.

THE PARLIAMENTARY INTELLIGENCE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE (EOS COMMITTEE)

The EOS Committee is responsible for continuous supervision of the secret services.

The Storting may appoint parliamentary commissions of inquiry.

Public hearing in the Storting's Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs Committee on the report from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.



The Storting at work

Anyone who wishes may obtain information about the work of the Storting. The sittings of the Storting are open to the public and the media. Debates can be followed directly from the Public Gallery or via the Storting's own online TV service (www.stortinget.no).

A number of publications are also issued in the course of proceedings. These include the Government's reports and propositions, and the Storting's recommendations, decisions and records of proceedings.

The Constitution provides rules concerning the composition, duties and activities of the Storting, but does not specify all the details of working procedures. The Storting's Rules of Procedure contain rules concerning the organization and working procedures of the Storting.

THE STORTING CONVENES AND CONSTITUTES ITSELF

"The Storting shall as a rule assemble on the first weekday in October every year." (Article 68 of the Constitution)

The Members assemble on the first weekday in October to begin a new session of the Storting. When a newly elected Storting first convenes, the credentials that the Members are given by their counties are examined and approved.

When the recommendation from the Credentials Committee has been acted upon, the Storting proceeds to elect its President and five Vice Presidents. Two Secretaries are also elected. These elections are carried out every year.

When it has been reported to the Storting that their Presidents and Secretaries have been elected, the President declares the Storting lawfully constituted and notifies the King.

THE STATE OPENING OF THE STORTING

The King normally performs the State Opening of the Storting on the first working day after the Storting has constituted itself. The Speech from the Throne, which is delivered by the King, is a presentation of the Government's programme for the coming year. After this, a member of the Government reads the Report on the State of the Realm. Some days later, the Speech from the Throne is debated by the Storting.



The president of Finland, Alexander Stubb, signs the visitor's book of the Storting in the Eidsvoll Gallery with the president of the Storting, Masud Gharahkhani.

THE PRESIDIUM

The main responsibility of the Presidium is to administer and timetable the formal business of the Storting. It is also responsible for ensuring that the Rules of Procedure are complied with.

The Presidium also has responsibility for representation, such as during visits by parliamentary delegations from abroad.

The President of the Storting is second in precedence after the King.

PREPARATORY WORK

The work of the Storting does not consist exclusively of the activities that take place in the Chamber. Much of the work of the Members takes place in committees, where it is less visible to the general public. In fact, it is in the committees that the real decisions on most matters of business are made.

THE STANDING COMMITTEES OF THE STORTING

It is the job of the committees to prepare the matters that will be deliberated by the Storting.

The composition of the standing committees is decided by an Election Committee of 37 members. The parties are proportionally represented as far as possible on this committee, and geographical distribution is also taken into account.

When the committees have been appointed, each committee elects a Chair, a First Vice Chair and a Second Vice Chair. The committees vary in size, but normally have from 11 to 18 members.

Most of the matters deliberated by the Storting are first prepared by one of the standing committees. Matters are usually prepared by the committee with a name closely resembling the name of the Ministry responsible for the matter. For example, the Standing Committee on Health and Care Services deals with matters within the remit of the Ministry of Health and Care Services.

For each item of business sent to a committee, the committee elects a spokesperson, who then assumes responsibility for obtaining information and seeing the matter



through the procedure in committee until the committee has adopted its final recommendation. This recommendation contains a summary of the matter and the comments of the committee with a proposed decision.

The recommendation is submitted to the Storting, which is responsible for the final decision.

Many matters are concluded with a unanimous decision by the committee. Disagreement among the Members will often lead to the committee splitting into two or more factions over specific issues. Each faction may elect its own spokesperson in the matter. In particularly difficult matters, often of a political nature, it is usual that the factions discuss the matter in meetings with the party groups or their steering committees. The political standpoints that are clarified in these meetings later form the basis of the negotiations that take place in the committee. The meetings are held behind closed doors.

In the course of proceedings, a committee may call in representatives from ministries, organizations, or other affected parties to

hearings for the purpose of obtaining information. Organizations and individuals may also request to appear before a committee to present their views. These hearings must be held in public unless otherwise decided.

A measure that has received a majority vote in a committee will normally receive a majority vote in the Storting as well, though there is less assurance of the outcome if the proportional representation of the parties in the committee differs from that of the Storting.

Normally, the committees may only consider matters received from the Storting. The Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs is an exception in this respect, since it is free to “make any further inquiries within the administration deemed necessary for the Storting’s scrutiny of the public administration”.

THE ENLARGED STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE

The Election Committee also appoints an Enlarged Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. This consists of the ordinary members of the Standing Committee

Meeting of the Education and Research Committee.



During important meetings the Central Hall becomes the focal point of both media and politicians.

on Foreign Affairs and Defence, the President of the Storting and the chairs of the party groups (if they are not already members of the committee). The Election Committee may, at the request of a group, appoint further members if it finds that considerations regarding the proportional representation of the groups so indicate.

The duty of the Committee is to discuss important foreign policy, trade policy and national security policy issues. These discussions take place before major decisions are taken by the Government. The business of this Committee is kept secret unless otherwise expressly decided.

ADVISORY BODIES

The European Consultative Committee is a purely advisory body, the function of which is to advise the Government on Norway's responsibilities in relation to the various EU directives considered by the EEA Joint Committee, which is a joint body for EU and EFTA countries.

PARLIAMENTARY PARTY GROUPS AND GROUP SECRETARIATS

When the newly elected Members arrive at the Storting, they organize themselves in party groups. The Members elected from the same political party constitute a party group.

Each group elects a steering committee and a Chair, who is also called the party's parliamentary leader. The Chair makes certain political decisions, coordinates group activities, suggests the distribution of Members among the committees, and so on.

Most party groups hold meetings on Wednesday afternoons, when important matters are discussed and the Members inform on the matters currently being dealt with by the standing committees to which they belong. The party groups discuss and clarify their positions on all the important matters to be considered by the Storting so that the Members can stand as united as possible there. A minority usually bows to the view of the majority, and votes in support of it when the matter comes up in the Storting. In the case of matters of importance to the



individual Members' constituencies (e.g. localization matters), local considerations may take precedence over the view of the party majority. The same may apply in "matters of conscience". Group meetings are not open to the public.

Each party group has its own secretariat at the Storting, which assists the Members with work of a political or more practical nature.

SITTINGS OF THE STORTING

The schedule of sittings for the coming week is announced at the end of each week. The Presidium decides when the Storting is to meet, and sets the agenda for each sitting. The sitting and the agendas must be announced at least 24 hours before they are due to start.

Seven minutes before the start of a sitting, bells ring throughout the Storting Building, calling the Members to the sitting. The Constitution states that the President must ascertain that a minimum of 50% of the Members (85) are present before calling the sitting to order.

When a Member begins to speak, he or she addresses the President, and therefore begins with the words "Honourable President", "Mr President", "President" or the like. The President chairs the sitting and maintains order in the Chamber during the sitting.

It is the President's job to ensure that speakers do not exceed their time limits. When a lengthy debate is anticipated (e.g. the debate on the Speech from the Throne), the President agrees with the parliamentary leaders on the length of the debate, distribution of speaking time and the speaking order to ensure a fair distribution of speaking time between the party groups.

Sittings are usually held from 10.00 AM. They may last beyond 10.00 PM if the Storting agrees.

The seat for MP number 1 from Nordland constituency.



During a vote, red and green buttons on the panels are used. The screen shows which issue is currently debated and who's on the rostrum.

VOTING

When all the speakers enrolled have spoken, the President declares the debate closed. The matter is put to the vote at a time decided by the Storting's Presidium. All matters except proposed amendments to the Constitution can be voted on when at least half of the Members are present in the Chamber. In order to debate proposed amendments to the Constitution, at least two-thirds of the Members must be present. A special call signal is used to call Members into the Chamber for voting.

Parliamentary proceedings end with voting, often after lengthy discussions by committees and party groups and extensive debate. The result of the voting may be a unanimous support or rejection of the proposal, but is more likely to show a majority for or against.

In the Storting Chamber, the electronic voting system is usually used. Members voting for a motion press a green button marked "for" and remain seated, while those voting against press a red button marked "against" and stand up. When voting is complete, the

results are shown on results boards. They are also available on the Storting's website.

Roll call voting is used for particularly important or controversial matters, often when voting over proposed amendments to the Constitution and always when voting over a motion of no confidence or a call for a vote of confidence.

Secret ballots are only used in connection with elections.

Votes are normally decided by a simple majority, i.e. more than half of the votes cast. Amendments to the Constitution require a two-thirds majority. Article 115 of the Constitution requires a three-quarters majority for legislation which would transfer authority to international organizations.



“THE EMPTY CHAMBER”

The working hours of a Member of the Storting are not regulated by contract, nor do the provisions of the Working Environment Act apply.

A day in the life of a Member is determined by the schedule of meetings in the parties and committees, and by the sittings in the Storting. These meetings normally call for a certain amount of preparatory work on the part of the Member: documents to study, information to be obtained, memoranda and other documents to be prepared and speeches to be composed on current items of business in the Storting.

Members are also involved in other meetings during the course of the day; with organizations, ministries, and delegations as well as visits by constituents and others who wish to speak to the Member. Then there are letters and enquiries to be answered; newspapers articles to be written; speeches, presentations and papers to be prepared; and meetings

outside the Storting, often in the evening. A considerable amount of time is spent travelling, particularly in Norway.

Many people who have seen televised broadcasts from the Storting Chamber have wondered why there are often so few Members present (“the empty Chamber”). Of course, attendance to their many duties makes it impossible for the Members to sit in the Chamber all day. An individual Member is therefore usually present in the Chamber when he or she is involved in a particular item of business, takes a special interest in a specific measure, or would like to hear what a certain Member has to say on a matter, perhaps with a view to taking part in the debate. Members often follow the debates via online TV.

At least half of the Members of the Storting are required to be present in the Chamber when the meeting is convened, and to participate in all votes (unless they have “paired off” or are on leave of absence).

The Storting Chamber is sometimes referred to as “the empty Chamber”.

Glossary

B

Bill: see Proposition to the Storting (Bill)

Budget proceedings: work on the Fiscal Budget. Besides work on legislation and supervision of the Government and public administration, this is the most important responsibility of the Storting.

C

central public administration: government apparatus staffed by permanent officials who assist in planning and implementing all of the measures and responsibilities adopted by the political authorities.

constitution: legal system that forms the basis of how a state is governed. The written Constitution is an important part of our constitution, as are the legal rules derived from long political practice (customary constitutional law).

constitution of the Storting: The Storting convenes on the first weekday in October. When the Storting has elected its Presidents and Secretaries, the President declares the Storting lawfully constituted.

Council of State: The Government under the leadership of the King normally meets at the

Royal Palace every Friday at 11.00 AM. If the King is indisposed or is travelling abroad, the meeting is chaired by the Crown Prince. If the King's absence is due to travel in Norway, he may "delegate the administration of the Realm to the Council of State" (Article 13 of the Constitution).

Credentials Committee: When a new Storting assembles, the elected Members bring with them credentials from their county election boards providing a mandate to take up a seat in the Storting. The credentials are checked by the Storting's Credentials Committee in order to ensure that the Members have been elected in accordance with current statutes and regulations. The recommendation of the Credentials Committee is considered by the Storting. There have been occasions when it has been necessary to order a new election (e.g. Buskerud and Troms in 1981).

D

delegate: transfer authority, usually from one body to another, e.g. from the Storting to the Government or ministries.

dissent: disagreement, opinion that deviates from that of the majority.

E

electoral register: register of persons with the right to vote in an election.

electoral term: the four-year term of office of a Storting.

enabling Act: Act whereby the Storting delegates to the Government and public administration the drafting of further rules and regulations within the area covered by the Act.

F

faction: a party, or a group within a party, that takes a specific standpoint in a committee or the like. Majority and minority factions are often referred to.

I

interpellation: more extensive form of question to the Government or a minister, often concerning a major and politically important matter.

L

lobbying (or lobbyism): the practice of making direct representations to Members, by individuals, organizations or companies, in order to influence and change policy and actions. Lobbyist: person or people who engage in lobbying.

M

majority government: government that has the support of a majority of the Storting.

minority government: government formed by a party or parties that do not hold a majority of the seats in the Storting.

N

nomination: the process by which candidates are selected prior to an election. The individuals whose names are included in electoral lists are nominated by the political parties.

O

Official Norwegian Report (Norges Offentlige Utredninger, NOU): Report based on government consultations in specific matters or spheres of responsibility. Informally referred to as a green paper.

P

parliamentarianism (or parliamentary rule): system of government where the Government is responsible to the national assembly (in Norway, the Storting). The party or parties that shall govern is decided by a majority of the Members of the Storting. The Storting can force the Government to resign through a vote of no confidence. A Government need not always have the support of a majority (e.g. in the case of a minority government), but it cannot continue to rule if it is opposed by a majority. Parliamentarianism has evolved through customary constitutional law, but was written into the Constitution on 20 February 2007.

(parliamentary) party group: group consisting of the Members elected from a given political party.

parliamentary leader: leader of a party group in the Storting.

precedent: decision that functions as a pattern for subsequent decisions of a similar kind.

Presidium: When the Storting constitutes itself, it elects a President and five Vice Presidents. These six individuals collectively constitute the Storting's Presidium and are responsible for administering the business of the Storting. The Presidents chair the sittings in alternating calendar months. In their absence, a Deputy President or temporary president may lead the meetings.

Private Member's Bill: Bill submitted by a Member of the Storting.

Private Member's Motion: Motion for decision submitted by a Member of the Storting.

proportional representation: electoral

system whereby seats are divided between the parties (electoral lists) in relation to the number of votes received by them in the election. This system has operated in Norway since 1920.

proposed amendments to the Constitution:

Article 121 of the Constitution provides that proposed amendments to the Constitution shall be submitted during the first, second or third Storting of an electoral term, but shall be considered during the first, second or third Storting of the following electoral term. There will thus always be a parliamentary election between submission of a proposed amendment and the decision as to whether or not to adopt it. This allows the electorate to make its opinions known. A two-thirds majority is required to adopt an amendment to the Constitution, and at least two-thirds of the Members must be present in the Chamber to vote on any constitutional matter. Proposed amendments to the Constitution are considered by the plenary Storting. The Storting that considers the proposal may not make any amendments to it. It must either be adopted as it stands or be rejected in its entirety. Several alternative proposals are therefore often submitted in order to provide the Storting that considers them with a number of options.

Propositions to the Storting:

Proposition to the Storting (Bill): legislative Bill sent by the Government. It contains a draft enactment of a Bill which the Storting may vote over. The abbreviation for this is Prop. X L (session), where X is the serial number. Propositions to the Storting may contain both a draft enactment of a Bill and a draft proposal for a resolution of the Storting (general or budget items). The abbreviation for this is Prop. X LS (session), where X is the serial number.

Proposition to the Storting (Resolution of the Storting): proposal by the Government concerning a matter to be considered by the

Storting. Such a Proposition often contains a proposal to allocate public funds for a specific purpose or a proposal to acquire public funds for the state in specific ways. It may also contain a proposed agreement requiring the state to act in a specific way without economic consequences. The Proposition always contains a preworded document for the Storting to vote on. The abbreviation for this is Prop. X S (session), where X is the serial number.

Q

quorum: When voting on ordinary matters, at least half of the Members must be present in the Chamber, whereas two-thirds of the Members must be present when voting on amendments to the Constitution.

R

Recommendation: When a committee has considered a matter, it submits a written Recommendation stating the views of the committee and proposing a decision.

reply: short statement or response. In a debate, the President must permit the exchange of brief remarks and replies provided that the Storting does not decide otherwise. The remark must be related to the speech concerned. Each speaker may speak for up to one minute. The speaker whose speech causes the debate may reply to each speaker in turn. The entire exchange of remarks may comprise up to five remarks with replies, but may be limited to three.

Report to the Storting: orientations of the Storting by the Government on various aspects of state activities (e.g. annual reports of state enterprises and agencies, reports concerning Norway's participation in different forms of international cooperation) or plans that the Government intends to implement and which it wishes to raise in the Storting. If the Government wishes to withdraw a proposition, this must be done in the form

of a Report to the Storting. Such a report is commonly referred to as a white paper.

representative democracy: In a representative democracy, the people govern via elected representatives, who act on behalf of the people, and thereby look after the interests of the voters and are accountable to them at the next election.

Royal Assent: The King in Council approves a statute adopted by the Storting with his signature, and the Prime Minister countersigns.

Rules of Procedure: The Storting's Rules of Procedure regulate the Storting's working procedures, but do not affect all aspects of the work of the Storting. The rules, composition and functions of the Storting are laid down in the Constitution, but the Constitution does not specify all the details of working procedures.

S

sovereignty of the people: The power of the state is derived from the people. The people (i.e. all those entitled to vote) have given the state the authority to adopt statutes that limit the freedom of individual citizens. In our representative system, sovereignty of the people is exercised by the Storting, which thereby governs on behalf of the people. The Government can be removed by a majority of the Storting.

Speech from the Throne: speech read by the King at the State Opening of the Storting. It contains the Government's political programme for the coming year. The Speech from the Throne is debated in the Storting.

spokesperson: A standing committee appoints a spokesperson for each item of business sent to the committee. The spokesperson presents the matter to the committee, drafts the Recommendation and gives an account of the matter to the Storting.

standing committees: Some of the most important work of the Storting takes place

in the 12 standing committees. Almost all matters brought before the Storting are first considered by a committee. All Members of the Storting serve on at least one of the 12 standing committees.

State Opening of the Storting: When the Storting has constituted itself, notification of this is given to the King. It is usual for the King to perform the State Opening of the Storting on the day after the constitution of the Storting. The King reads the Speech from the Throne. The Report on the State of the Realm is normally read by the minister who has served for the shortest period or by the youngest minister if all ministers have served for an equal length of time.

V

voting: After a proposal has been debated, the MPs vote on the recommendations made by the standing committees. The vote is held at a time decided by the Storting's Presidium.

vote of confidence: When a Government calls a vote of confidence in a matter, it means that it will resign if the vote goes against the Government. This applies when the Government either interprets a proposal as showing no confidence or when the Government states that it will not accept a proposal that is submitted.

W

whip: the person or persons in each party group responsible for the pairing off of Members who for various reasons must be away from the Storting for short periods. In this way, the relative distribution of parties in the Storting is maintained in connection with voting.

white paper: see Report to the Storting.



The Storting
Chamber seen
from the public
gallery.

Visiting the Storting



THE PUBLIC GALLERY

Members of the public can follow the debates in the Storting Chamber from the Public Gallery. Please use the entrance from Karl Johans gate. All visitors must go through a security check. Please note that outerwear, bags and purses must be stored in one of the designated lockers. See www.stortinget.no for an overview of parliamentary sittings.

GUIDED TOURS

The Storting provides guided tours for tourists during the summer weeks. See www.stortinget.no/en for dates and more information.


FOLLOW US



PHOTO CREDITS: All Photos by the Storting, except:
Cover: Ivan Brodey
Page 4–5, 12, 22–23, 30: Stortinget/Morten Brakestad
Page 8: Stortinget/Teigens fotoatelier as
Page 10: Stortinget/Vidar M. Husby
Page 17: Stortinget/Benjamin A. Ward

The Storting and Democracy
ISBN 978-82-8196-225-5 (print)
ISBN 978-82-8196-226-2 (online)

© The Storting's Administration, 2024

 Svanemerket trykksak, 2041 0654

