



REPUBLIK ÖSTERREICH  
Parlament

## The Austrian Parliament



*Visitors Centre*



Imprint:  
Publisher and media owner: Parliament's office  
Editors: Barbara Blümel, Thomas Holzinger,  
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Graphic Design: Bernhard Kollmann  
Printer: Friedrich VDV Linz  
Picture credits: Cover: Atelier Schifflleitner;  
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Vienna, October 2006

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*The Parliament Building*



*Historical Assembly Hall*

## The Parliament Building

The parliament building on the famous Ringstrasse in Vienna has housed several different parliamentary bodies since its construction in the late 19th century.

The building was originally constructed to be the seat of the imperial parliament which governed over the Austrian half of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. It was designed by the architect Theophil Hansen and built between 1874 and 1884.

Hansen's architectural concept pays tribute to Ancient Greece as the "cradle of democracy". This type of architecture is called historicism. The building itself incorporates two large assembly halls which are connected by a central block and dominated by its huge portico. This arrangement thus reflects the bicameral nature of the imperial parliament which was established in 1861 after Emperor Franz Josef had issued the February Patent. The upper house was known as the "*Herrenhaus*" and the lower house was called the "*Abgeordnetenhaus*". In 1918, the parliament building bore witness to Austria's transformation into a Republic. Between 1919 and 1920, the constitutive National Council compiled the Federal Constitutional Law, which still forms the basis of Austria's constitution.

The two central government institutions in the Federal Republic of Austria, the National Council and the Federal Council, have had their seat in the Viennese parliament building since 1920, except during the period 1934-1945. During the Second World War, the parliament building was severely damaged following bombardment by the Allies; less than half of its structure was left intact. The reconstruction work, completed in 1956, saw the National Council's assembly redesigned in a modern, functional style. The restoration work on the other publicly accessible areas as well as the reconstruction of the building's exterior remained, for the most part, faithful to the original design.



## The National Council (*Nationalrat*)

The National Council consists of 183 members who are elected by the people for a term of four years. The electorate includes all Austrian nationals who are over eighteen.

The National Council's main responsibility is generating legislation. A bill is generally created by the government or the members of the National Council itself. The bills are then discussed by committee in the National Council and finally decided on by the plenum.

Just as important is the National Council's controlling function. The members have various instruments at their disposal to ensure that laws are correctly executed. The representatives can address members of the government, either directly or per letter, submit audit assignments to the audit court or set up investigative committees. Controlling is one of the chief responsibilities of the opposition parties.

Upon passing a resolution, the National Council will notify the government of its agenda. Having the trust of the National Council is essential for any government. Were this trust to be lost, the federal president would be called upon to dissolve the government.

The National Council's line regarding any projects planned within the framework of the EU must be upheld by the Austrian representatives in the organs of the EU.

## The Federal Council (*Bundesrat*)

The Federal Council consists of 62 members who are elected by the parliaments of Austria's nine federal states. The length of their term in office is based on the legislative period of their respective state parliament. Each state sends, based on its size, a minimum of three or a maximum of twelve representatives to the Federal Council. The Federal Council represents the interests of Austria's states on a national level and acts in this capacity when working on national legislature. Any resolutions or treaties composed in the National Council are immediately passed on to the Federal Council and discussed in a committee before they go to the plenum.

If it has good cause, the Federal Council can veto most resolutions passed by the National Council, in which case the resolution goes back to the National Council and has to be dealt with again. The National Council can, however, override the Federal Council's veto by activating a constitutional element known as a "*Beharrungsbeschluss*". The Federal Council can only prevent a bill from being passed (absolute power of veto) if said bill would alter the competencies of the federal states.

The members of the Federal Council also have the right to direct questions at the government. In addition, they can make resolutions as well as play a role in EU affairs.

*Assembly Hall of the National Council*



*Assembly Hall of the Federal Council*

