



The House of
Representatives

The House of Representatives Workings

PARLIAMENTARY TERM (in principle 4 years)

The period for which the deputies are elected is called the “Parliamentary term” (in principle four years, unless the House is dissolved early).

► *Start*

After the elections the House of Representatives meets within two months of the previous parliament being dissolved.

The first session of deputies after the elections is chaired by the outgoing President of the House or, for lack of him, the member with the greatest length of service, who is assisted by the four youngest deputies. Their first task at the start of the new parliamentary term is to verify the credentials which means checking the eligibility of these members and verifying the validity of their election. All the members can take part in this verification. Following this, the deputies take the constitutional oath⁽¹⁾ in a plenary session open to the public.

One of the first tasks of the deputies consists of appointing the President and the members of the Bureau, forming the committees, the presidency, etc. All the political groups may claim a certain number of appointments on the basis of their numerical size in the plenary assembly.

► *End*

The legislature is closed by an act of dissolution (= Royal Decree) of the King (=Federal government). This act includes a convoking of the electorate within forty days and the meeting of the new parliament within two months (art. 46 Constitution). (See illustration 1)

SESSION (in principle one year)

► *Ordinary session*

An ordinary session is the period of one year during which the House of Representatives meets by rights. It goes from the

second Tuesday of October until the day before the second Tuesday of October in the following year (art. 44 Constitution). Each parliamentary term in principle consists of four ordinary sessions.

► *Extraordinary session*

It is an extraordinary session when the House of Representatives is dissolved early (before the end of the parliamentary term) and parliamentary elections are held. The newly elected House meets in an extraordinary session for the rest of the session in progress (for example: during the ordinary session 1998-99, the House was dissolved early and elections were held on 13 juni 1999. The House met in extraordinary session from 1 July 1999 until the start of the next ordinary session, 1999-00, i.e. on 12 October 1999).

► *Start of the session: opening of the parliamentary year*

The Constitution stipulates that Parliament meets by rights on the second Tuesday of October (art. 44 Constitution). “By rights” means that the ordinary session is opened automatically without being convened by the King (= the Federal government).

► *Duration of the session*

The Constitution stipulates that Parliament must meet each year for at least 40 days (art. 44 Constitution). In the course of the parliamentary year there are three recesses: Christmas holidays, Easter holidays and summer holidays (from 20 July until the end of September).

► *End of session*

The parliamentary session is closed by the King (= the Federal government) by Royal Decree. In reality it is done on the day before the next session is opened, so that the Parliament remains in session throughout the year. (See illustration 2)

⁽¹⁾ See information sheet 9

PARLIAMENTARY WEEK

The House draws up its own agenda according to political events.

The weekly schedule below gives an idea of the organisation of a parliamentary week. In practice the House agenda often departs from this schedule.

► Monday

In principle, the management bodies of the parties (the party bureaux) meet on Monday. In general the parliamentarians are represented within the bureau (the practical composition of which differs from one party to the next). During these meetings the parties set out their positions concerning the government decisions or political problems. The position of a party constitutes an important signal, both for the government, the parliamentary groups, the members of the party and for the citizen.

The committees of enquiry often meet on Monday to hear experts (for example members of the police, doctors, professors, etc).

► Tuesday

The parliamentary committees meet on Tuesday. They discuss Bills and Private Member's Bills and interpellate or question ministers.

Illustration 1

SERVICE PUBLIC FEDERAL CHANCELLERIE DU PREMIER MINISTRE ET SERVICE PUBLIC FEDERAL INTERIEUR	
F. 2003 — 1420	[S - C - 2003/21083]
9 AVRIL 2003. — Arrêté royal portant convocation des collèges électoraux pour l'élection des Chambres législatives fédérales, ainsi que convocation des nouvelles Chambres législatives fédérales	
ALBERT II, Roi des Belges, A tous, présents et à venir, Salut.	
Vu les articles 195, alinéas 1 ^{er} , 2 et 3, et 46, alinéa 5, de la Constitution;	
Vu l'article . . .	
Nous avons arrêté et arrêtons :	
Article 1^{er}. Les collèges électoraux de toutes les circonscriptions électorales du Royaume sont convoqués le dimanche 18 mai 2003 entre 8 et 13 heures dans les cantons électoraux où le vote s'exprime au moyen de bulletins en papier, et entre 8 et 15 heures dans les cantons électoraux où le vote est automatisé, à l'effet d'élire simultanément le nombre requis de membres de la Chambre des représentants et des membres du Sénat élus directement.	
Art. 2. La nouvelle Chambre des représentants et le nouveau Sénat limité aux sénateurs élus directement sont convoqués le jeudi 5 juin 2003.	
Art. 3. Le présent arrêté entre en vigueur le jour de sa publication au <i>Moniteur belge</i> .	
Art. 4. Notre Premier Ministre et Notre Ministre de l'Intérieur sont chargés, chacun en ce qui le concerne, de l'exécution du présent arrêté.	
Donné à Bruxelles, le 9 avril 2003.	
ALBERT	
Par le Roi :	
Le Premier Ministre, G. VERHOFSTADT	
Le Ministre de l'Intérieur, A. DUQUESNE	

If the agenda so requires, the House of Representatives meets in plenary session on this day, but it is fairly rare.

In addition, the College of Quaestors meets every two weeks on Tuesday.

► Wednesday

On Wednesday the conference of presidents meets. This consists of the President and vice-presidents of the House of Representatives, former presidents who are still deputies, the president and a member of each political group, and a government representative. The conference sets the agenda for the plenary session. The plenary assembly then approves it.

Like on Tuesday, committees also meet on Wednesday.

On Wednesday the House generally meets in plenary session every two weeks.

► Thursday

The political groups meet on Thursday morning. They establish their positions on political problems and the parliamentary work.

The afternoon is reserved for the plenary session.

Question time is between 14:00 and 15:00 : the deputies may put questions to ministers on topical subjects.

Then follow the voting explanations of the groups and the votes themselves on the Bills and Private Member's Bills, resolutions, and motions. The other parliamentary activities are kept to a minimum in order to allow parliamentarians to participate in the votes.

► Friday

On Friday there are generally no parliamentary activities in order to allow deputies to devote their time to local matters. It can be seen, however, that the committees of enquiry are increasingly meeting on Fridays.

Illustration 2

MINISTERE DE L'INTERIEUR	
F. 2002 — 3343	[C - 2002/00677]
20 SEPTEMBRE 2002. — Arrêté royal portant clôture de la session parlementaire ordinaire de 2001-2002	
ALBERT II, Roi des Belges, A tous, présents et à venir, Salut.	
Vu l'article 44 de la Constitution;	
Sur la proposition de Notre Ministre de l'Intérieur,	
Nous avons arrêté et arrêtons :	
Article 1^{er}. La session parlementaire de 2001-2002 est close.	
Art. 2. Le présent arrêté entre en vigueur le 7 octobre 2002.	
Art. 3. Notre Ministre de l'Intérieur est chargé de l'exécution du présent arrêté.	
Donné à Bruxelles, le 20 septembre 2002.	
ALBERT	
Par le Roi :	
Le Ministre de l'Intérieur, A. DUQUESNE	

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01.07.2003