

FACTS ABOUT THE RIKSDAG

The Committees – how they prepare decisions

PHOTO: MELKER DAHLSTAND



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A meeting of the Committee on Industry and Trade. The Government parties (Social Democratic Party and Green Party) have 7 members of a total of 17 in each committee.

Every year, the Riksdag takes hundreds of decisions. Parliamentary business concerns legislation, and determination of central government revenue and expenditure. Before the members of the Riksdag meet to make a decision, a great deal of preparation has already been carried out by the parliamentary committees. It is even laid down in the Swedish Constitution that matters decided in the Chamber must be prepared by a committee first.

Committee meetings are held behind closed doors. This is in order to enable the members of the Committee to discuss sensitive political issues and reach a consensus.

Fifteen parliamentary committees

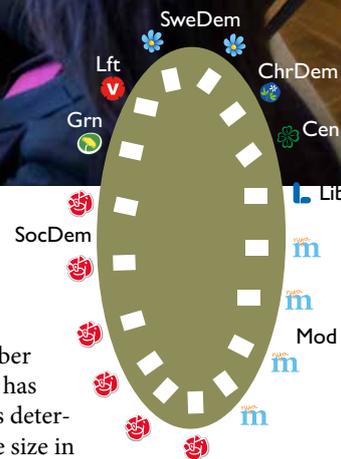
There are 15 parliamentary committees which are responsible for preparing legislative proposals within their respective areas of responsibility. The Committee on Finance is, for example, responsible for the central government budget, and the Committee on Health and Welfare for healthcare. The committees also monitor developments in the EU in order to be able to influence decisions as early as possible.

Each committee must have an odd number of MPs, and a minimum of 15. At present, all of the

committees have 17 members. The number of members a party has in the committees is determined by its relative size in the Riksdag, so that the biggest party in the Riksdag also has the greatest number of members in each committee. The idea behind having the same balance of power in the committees and the Chamber is to make it as easy as possible to deal with the committees' proposals, and that the decision-making process in the Chamber should be predictable.

The parties agree among themselves how the positions of chair and deputy chair of each committee are to be distributed. If the chair represents one of the parties in government, the deputy chair is normally chosen from the opposition, and vice versa.

At present, the parties which form the Swedish Government, have a total of 7 members in each committee, while the other parties have 10. Their vote sometimes has a decisive impact on the Riksdag's decisions. When the same number of members vote in favour of a proposal as against, the proposal supported by the committee chair wins.



The Government proposes

Every year, the Government submits approximately 200 bills and communications that vary greatly in length and level of complexity. When a Government bill reaches the Riksdag, it is reported to the Chamber. This is known as “tabling”, and the purpose is to give the members of the Riksdag time to become acquainted with the proposal. After this, the bill is sent to the committee responsible for the subject area covered in the proposal.

After the Government bill has been reported to the Chamber, the members usually have 15 days in which to present their counter-proposals, which are known as private members’ motions. They can object to the entire proposal, or just certain parts of it. A motion can also contain a request that the matter be further examined.

Normally, the parties that are not in government, that is, the opposition, submit the most private members’ motions. Motions can carry different degrees of political weight. The entire party, part of the party or just individual members can stand behind a motion.

During the general private members’ motions period in the early autumn, the members of the Riksdag are free to submit motions on any subject they wish. This means the motions do not need to be linked to a specific Government bill. Such motions may nevertheless be taken up in connection with a Government bill, when they cover the same subject.

The committees prepare decisions

When the period for submitting private members’ motions has expired, the committee starts to prepare the necessary documentation for a Riksdag decision. To assist the members, each committee has a secretariat, staffed by officials. The committee then considers the Government bill and any relevant private members’ motions. The members start by discussing the matter within their party groups. A party group consists of all the members of the Riksdag belonging to the same party. The members may need to consult their party groups several times when dealing with a legislative proposal.

In order to achieve a good basis for its proposals, the committee can obtain information by consulting various public authorities, organisations, other committees and the Council on Legislation. The Council on Legislation is made up of judges who examine whether a legislative proposal complies with Sweden’s fundamental laws and with other legislation in general. In the case of more important legislative propo-

sals, the Government has usually already consulted the Council on Legislation.

The committee can also hold hearings to which experts, such as researchers and representatives of the business sector, authorities and organisations, are invited to answer questions from the members. Some hearings are held behind closed doors, while others are open to the public.

Sometimes, the members make study visits or receive visits from stakeholders. They may occasionally travel abroad to study other countries’ political solutions.

Committee meetings

After the officials at the committee secretariat have compiled the basis for a decision, the members are called to a committee meeting. A matter is often dealt with on two separate occasions. The officials sometimes provide oral information at the meeting. They often provide supplementary information and answer questions.

When they attend the meeting, the members usually have the party’s preliminary view regarding the Government’s proposal and the associated private members’ motions with them. The role of the chair is to obtain an overall picture and to highlight the various proposals presented. Is the committee unanimous? Compromises are often needed in order to reach a majority in favour of a proposal. Sometimes several meetings are required in order to gain broader support for a matter.

The 15 parliamentary committees

- Committee on the Labour Market
- Committee on Civil Affairs
- Committee on Finance
- Committee on Defence
- Committee on Justice
- Committee on the Constitution
- Committee on Cultural Affairs
- Committee on Environment and Agriculture
- Committee on Industry and Trade
- Committee on Taxation
- Committee on Social Insurance
- Committee on Health and Welfare
- Committee on Transport and Communications
- Committee on Education
- Committee on Foreign Affairs

PHOTO: JYRKI SIIKANEN



The Committee on Civil Affairs has invited experts to a public hearing about young adults' opportunities to finance housing of their own. In the forefront Caroline Szyber (Christian Democrats) and Deputy Chair Johan Löfstrand (Social Democratic Party).

When a committee has reached a preliminary decision, the officials at the secretariat prepare a draft committee report. In the draft, the Government bill is presented as well as associated private members' motions, the reasoning of the committee and the committee's proposal. If there is a majority supporting a proposal, members with a different opinion are entitled to submit a reservation. A member who supports the majority opinion but wishes to highlight a certain issue can include a separate statement of opinion.

The next stage is a committee meeting, where the committee members take a decision. This is known as the "approval" of the committee report, and this usually happens at the second or third meeting on the matter. After the committee has published the report, it is forwarded to the Chamber, which informs the members that it has arrived.

Decisions in the Chamber

The members of the Riksdag debate and make decisions in the Chamber. These meetings are presided over by the Speaker, who is elected by the members to lead the work of the Riksdag. Decisions can be taken by the members of the Riksdag without a debate in the Chamber, for example, when the parties all agree on a proposal. They can also choose to hold a debate even if they are in agreement.

Within the 15 parliamentary committees, the members of the Riksdag become specialists in their various areas of responsibility. In the Chamber, they therefore primarily debate matters that their own committees have been involved in. For this reason, members from other committees often choose to be present in the Chamber only during the actual vote.

When a decision is taken, the Speaker asks whether the Chamber supports the committee's proposal. If no one objects, the Speaker notes that the answer is yes and confirms the decision with a strike of his or her gavel. However, a vote must be held even if just one member requests it. The parties can also choose to vote on certain points in the report.

Once the decision has been taken, the Riksdag sends a communication to the Government. It is then the Government's responsibility to ensure that the decision is implemented.

The autumn is about the budget

The Budget Bill is the Government's most comprehensive bill, and it covers the work of all the committees. It contains a proposal for the ceiling for central government expenditure. The central government budget is divided up into 27 expenditure areas, and responsibility for these expenditure areas is divided between the committees. The Budget Bill also contains an estimate of central government revenue in the form of taxes, charges, etc.

Work with the budget starts in the spring when the Government presents its guidelines for economic policy in the Spring Fiscal Policy Bill. The Riksdag adopts a decision on the Spring Fiscal Policy Bill in June. In September, the Government submits its proposal for the central government budget for the following year - the Budget Bill. The members of the Riksdag can then submit motions on the Budget Bill.

The parliamentary committees work with the budget proposals during the autumn. At the end of November, the Riksdag determines the total ceiling for central government expenditure, as well as how

funds are to be distributed between the various expenditure areas. In December, the Riksdag determines how funds are to be distributed within each expenditure area, as well as an estimate of central government revenue.

Sometimes things do not go as the Government and Riksdag had intended. The Government can then propose that the budget is revised, for example, by allocating more money to a public authority than was originally planned. Revisions to the budget can be made in April and September.

Monitor work in the EU

Each committee monitors work in the EU within its respective areas of responsibility. Certain committees work more with EU issues than others. The committees examine proposals from the EU and decide when more information is needed or when they need to hold discussions with the Government. EU issues are also part of many of the proposals from the Government or members of the Riksdag. A proposal is considered by the committee responsible for the subject area concerned.

The European Commission is responsible for legislative proposals, and almost all official EU documents that are sent to the Riksdag originate from the Commission. In the case of new, important EU documents, the Government has to inform the Riksdag of its views in explanatory memorandums.

When the European Commission wishes to obtain opinions on potential items of legislation, it sends consultation documents – white and green papers – to the governments and parliaments in the member states. The Riksdag has decided that all green and white papers are to be examined by the parliamentary committees. The committee responsible for the subject area concerned examines the consultation document. After its examination, it writes a statement which is then voted on in the Chamber. The Chamber can vote on the formulation of the statement.

The committees can also examine all draft legislation in areas in which both the national parliaments and the EU have decision-making powers. The committee considers whether the issue is best dealt with at the national level or at EU level. This is known as a subsidiarity check, and the underlying idea is that decisions should be taken as close to the citizens as possible.

Ahead of meetings of the Council of Ministers, the Government consults the Committee on European Union Affairs on what position Sweden should pursue. The Government is expected to follow the

The committees can take initiatives of their own

The committees can also present their own proposals to the Riksdag, for example, for new legislation. In addition, they can present their opinions to the Government in the form of an announcement.

In 2016, for example, the Committee on Justice proposed that the Government could extend demands for identity checks at Sweden's borders directly, without a waiting period (2015/16:JuU34). The Riksdag said yes to the proposal.

agreed position. The Committee on European Union Affairs is organised in the same way as a regular parliamentary committee but does not prepare decisions taken by the Riksdag.

Research, follow-up and evaluation

The Riksdag is not just responsible for adopting laws and deciding how central government funds are to be used. It also follows developments in society in order to be able to take swift action when necessary. This requires good background materials.

The committees have therefore started to work strategically with research and future issues to an increasing extent. They follow the potential impact of new technology and various research findings on society. Researchers are invited to public hearings, and the committees provide overviews of research within their subject areas, both nationally and internationally. These are often published in the series Reports from the Riksdag.

The committees also follow up and evaluate decisions taken by the Riksdag. This is done on an annual basis when the committees adopt a position on the Government's account of results in the Budget Bill. It is also done on a more in-depth basis, for example, when the committees examine whether the aims of a specific law have been achieved.

Further reading

- www.riksdagen.se
- www.eu-upplysningen.se
- Reports from the Riksdag