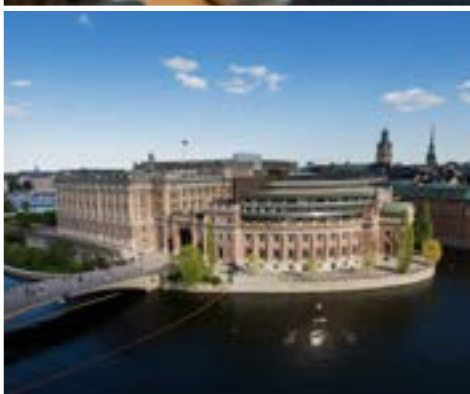


# How the Parliament works



# Welcome to the Riksdag

Transparency and accessibility are important elements of Swedish democracy and the work of the Swedish Parliament – the Riksdag. Via the Riksdag website [www.riksdagen.se](http://www.riksdagen.se) you can follow the day-to-day work and read about the decisions that are made in the Riksdag.

Or why not visit the Riksdag and listen to a debate in the Chamber, make a study visit, take a guided tour or take the chance to attend the Open Day which is held every two years? The media also monitor what happens in the Riksdag.

Main picture: October 2022 The members of the Riksdag assemble in the Chamber for the opening of the Riksdag session.

Right: On the way to the mini Riksdag in the former First Chamber.

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**Cover photo:** Melker Dahlstrand, Anders Löwdin. **Other photos:** Melker Dahlstrand, Anders Löwdin, Camilla Svensk, Holger Staffansson, Henrik Montgomery/TT. **Photo pages 1 and 29:** © Astrid Göransson/Bildupphovsrätt 2022. **Illustrations:** Chimney.

**Production:** The Riksdag Administration, Communications Division. **Printed by:** Exakta Print AB, November 2022.





# The Riksdag gives the Government its approval



**SWEDEN HAS HAD A DEMOCRATIC** form of government with a parliament (the Riksdag) as its principal decision-making body for a considerable period of time. It is a representative democracy, so the citizens elect their representatives, the members of the Riksdag, who in turn make the necessary decisions. Many of these decisions concern legislation. The MPs also appoint the Prime Minister, who in turn appoints the Government ministers.

The Swedish Constitution is made up of four fundamental laws which provide the framework for how the Riksdag and the Government exercise the power they have been awarded by the electorate. The Instrument of Government is the foremost of the country's four fundamental laws. This states that democracy in Sweden is based on a parliamentary system of government, in other words that the Government must be accepted by the Riksdag in order to be able to exercise its power. The King, who is the Head of State in Sweden, has no political power.

The fundamental laws also contain provisions on fundamental freedoms and rights enjoyed by citizens of Sweden. They include a guarantee that everyone has the right to influence the general development of society by freely accessing official documents issued by public authorities, expressing their opinions in general public debate and voting in free elections.

## THE SWEDISH CONSTITUTION

- **The Instrument of Government** describes how Sweden is to be governed.
- **The Act of Succession** regulates the order of succession to the throne in Sweden. Here it is stated that the throne is to be inherited.
- **The Freedom of the Press Act** provides each individual with the right to state their opinions and publish them without censorship.
- **The Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression** protects freedom of expression in other media such as radio and TV.

The Riksdag Act consists of the regulations for the Riksdag's working procedures.







The largest meeting room in the Riksdag is called the Chamber. It is here that the 349 MPs gather to debate and make decisions.



## The foremost representative of the people

**THE BASIS** of Sweden's representative democracy is that its citizens elect their representatives, the members of the Riksdag, every four years. At the same time, they elect representatives in municipal and regional councils who make decisions at the local and regional levels, where they are responsible for such matters as schools, health and medical care and various social services.

The municipalities and regions enjoy a high level of self-determination which is protected in the Swedish Constitution. This includes the right to tax their residents, but it is the Riksdag that determines the framework for their activities.

Modern representative democracy is based on the existence of parties that have different political messages to convey and different proposals concerning how society should develop. The political parties stand for election, and citizens vote primarily for these parties. It is also possible to vote for individual politicians who represent the party chosen, although, a vote for an individual is also a vote for a party.

If the voters are not satisfied with the way their representatives perform their tasks, they can show their dissatisfaction by voting for another party in the following elections.

### **PARLIAMENT CAN BRING GOVERNMENT DOWN**

The results of the elections to the Riksdag determine which party or parties may form the Government.

A Government cannot be formed or remain in office if the majority in parliament is against it – this is a cornerstone of what is termed parliamentary government. For a Government proposal to be accepted by the Riksdag, it has to be supported by a majority of the MPs voting in the Chamber.

If the Government loses this support, it may choose to resign or call an extraordinary election. The Riksdag can also force the Government to resign by means of a declaration of no confidence. This is one method of ensuring that the policies the electorate gave their support to on election day are reflected in the actions of the Government.

### **DIRECT DEMOCRACY VIA A REFERENDUM**

At some point, parliament may wish to hear citizens' opinions on a specific matter before it takes any further action; so a referendum is called, which is a form of direct democracy.

The few referendums that have taken place in Sweden have been consultative in nature. The most recent one took place in 2003, when voters said "no" to the introduction of the euro as Sweden's currency. The political parties heeded the result of the referendum.

The people make their voices heard. The Constitution safeguards the right to demonstrate.

Open Day at the Riksdag, spring 2017 – a meeting place for MPs and members of the public.







Every day a steady flow of Stockholmers and visitors pass through the Riksgatan Archway between the East and West Wings of the Riksdag.

# Just over 84 percent voted

**SWEDEN USES** the proportional representation system of voting which means that the number of seats a party wins in the Riksdag is in proportion to the number of votes it receives in the election. However, there is a qualification threshold of four per cent of the votes in the entire country in order to avoid having too many small parties in parliament. In certain circumstances, a party may win a seat in the Riksdag if it receives at least 12 percent of the votes cast in a single constituency.

Sweden is divided into 29 constituencies which basically correspond to its counties. This means that the members of the Riksdag come from all parts of the country.

Before an election, the parties decide which candidates are to stand for parliament. Their names are printed on their parties' ballot papers. Voters can put a cross next to the name of a candidate to show their first choice for a seat in the Riksdag. Such personal choices can also be made in municipal and region elections.

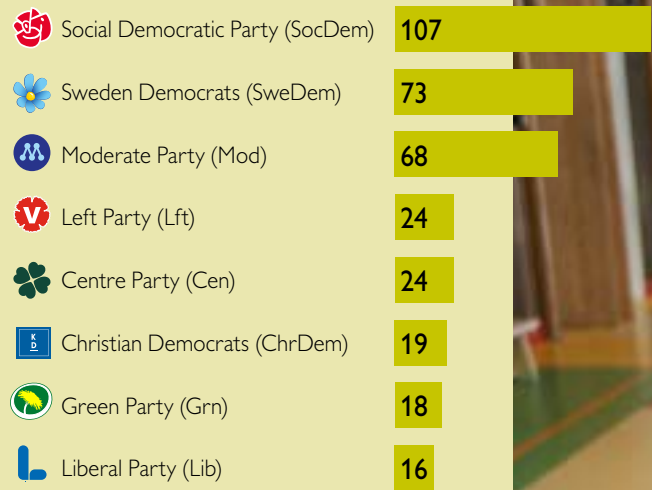
Since the 2010 elections, there have been eight parties in the Riksdag. Parties are elected for a four-year term.

Almost 7.8 million Swedish citizens were entitled to vote in the general elections of 2022. Voters must be Swedish citizens and 18 years of age by election day at the latest. Just over 84 percent of these participated in the elections; a high figure by international standards.

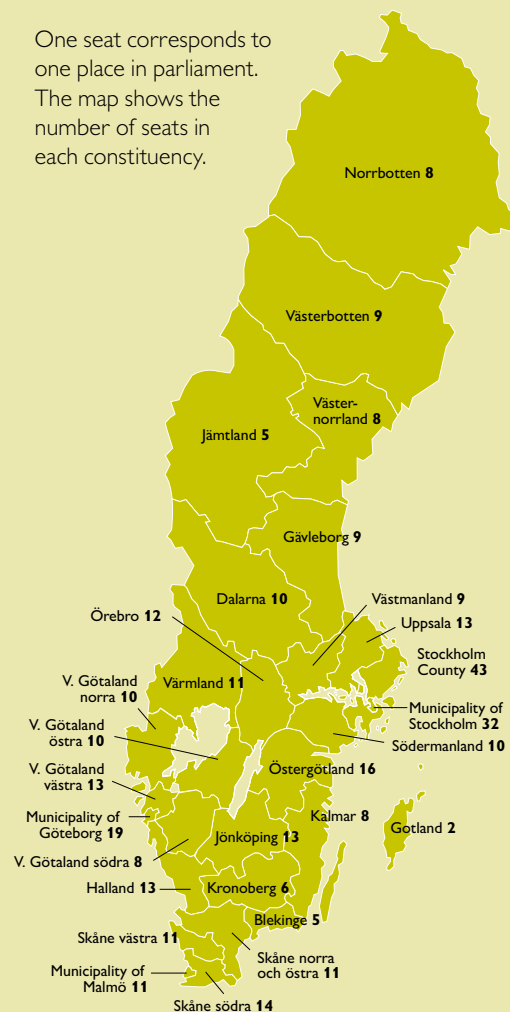
The fact that there are several political parties with different policies to vote for is a precondition for a country to be termed a democracy.



## THE DISTRIBUTION OF SEATS IN THE RIKSDAG AFTER THE 2022 ELECTIONS



One seat corresponds to one place in parliament. The map shows the number of seats in each constituency.







Three elections on the same day – the general election and local elections to regions and municipalities. The colour and number of ballot papers can be checked through a small opening in the ballot envelope.

## After the parliamentary elections

**AFTER A PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION**, a vote is held in the Riksdag to determine the support for the proposal for Prime Minister. This procedure is compulsory according to a constitutional amendment that came into force in January 2011.

Previously the Prime Minister simply remained in office if the election had not resulted in a change of political power, even if support was weak. It was up to the Riksdag to request a vote and if this vote showed that the Prime Minister did not have the support of

the Riksdag, the Government would also be forced to resign. When a Government resigns, the Speaker convenes a meeting of the party leaders to discuss the political situation. The Speaker is the principal representative of the Riksdag and leads its work. Following conversations with Riksdag party group leaders and the three Deputy Speakers, the Speaker proposes a new Prime Minister and a vote is then taken in the Chamber. The Prime Minister him/herself appoints the other ministers in the Government.



The ceremony at the opening of parliament follows a set pattern. After the Speaker's introduction the Riksdag is formally opened by the Swedish Head of State, King Carl XVI Gustaf. In the picture: King Carl XVI Gustaf.



**THE RIKSDAG MEETS**

When the members of the Riksdag meet after an election, their first task is to elect a Speaker and three Deputy Speakers from among the members of the Riksdag. Despite the fact that the Speaker is a member of a political party, he or she must be politically impartial in relation to the various parties when carrying out the responsibilities inherent in the position.

The Speaker leads the work of the Riksdag and the meetings in the Chamber where the MPs hold their debates and make decisions. The Speaker does

not take part in debates and is not allowed to vote when an item of business is to be decided. For this reason the Speaker's seat in parliament is taken by an alternate member from his or her party. The alternate member participates fully in all activities as an MP. The MPs who are part of the Government also have alternate members in their seats in the Riksdag.

Deputy Speakers may not participate in the debates they lead. However, they may vote when decisions are taken, and they may participate in the work of the committees.



The Speaker Andreas Norlén on his way to the Riksdag Press Centre.



When the members of the Riksdag meet in the Chamber after an election they elect the Speaker.



Third Deputy Speaker Kerstin Lundgren (Centre Party), First Deputy Speaker Kenneth G Forslund (Social Democratic Party), Speaker Andreas Norlén and Second Deputy Speaker Julia Kronlid (Sweden Democrats).

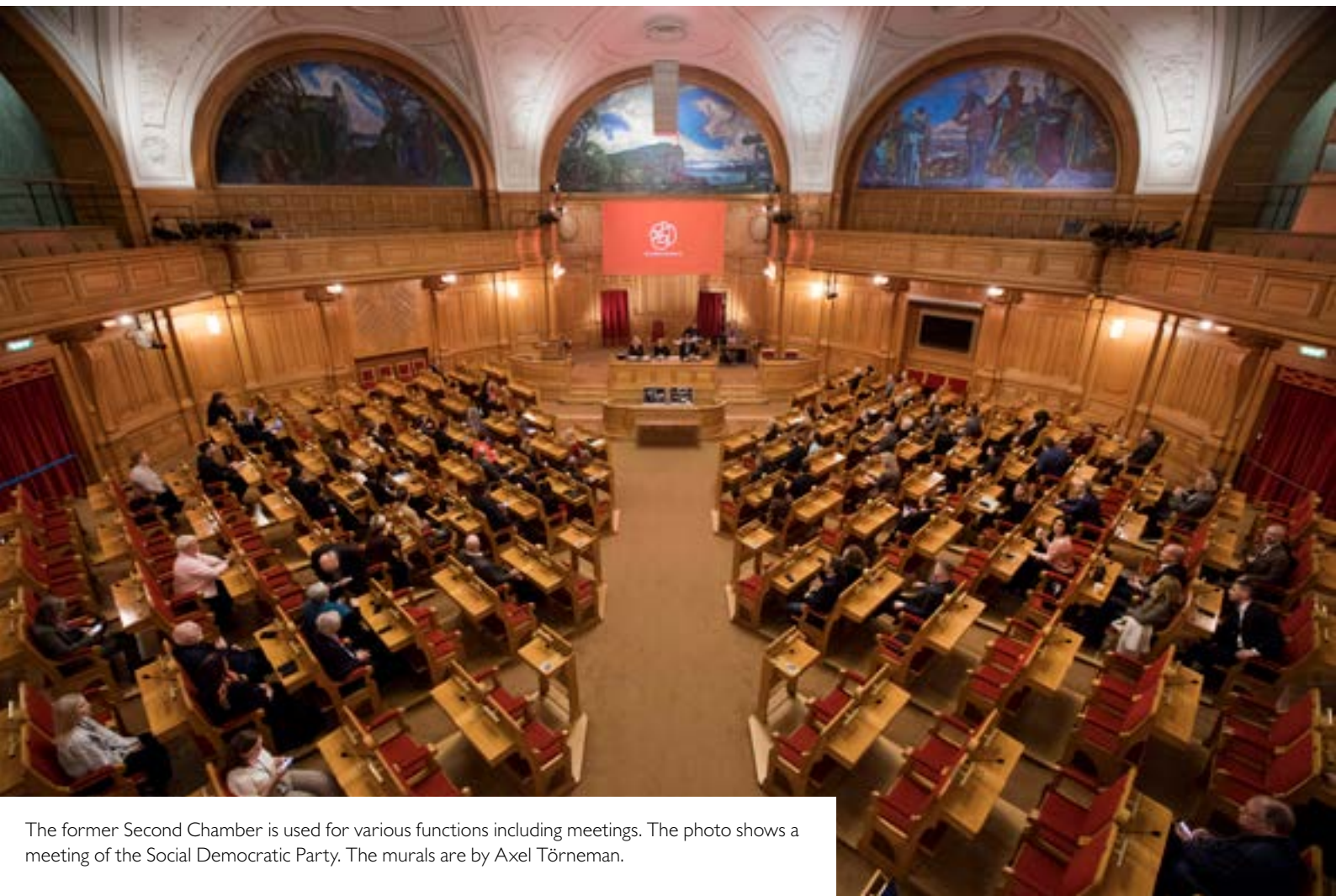
## Political parties in the Riksdag – and outside

**MEMBERS** who have been voted into the Riksdag and who belong to the same party form a parliamentary party group. Each party group has a secretariat in the Riksdag consisting of staff that the party itself employs. The party groups also decide themselves how they should work and be organised. Each party elected to the Riksdag receives special support via the central government budget which is intended to cover the costs of the party secretariat. The state also provides financial contributions for other activities run by the political parties outside the Riksdag.

For a large part of the Riksdag session, the whole party group will meet at least once a week for internal discussions, and to decide how the party is to shape its policies on important matters and what actions MPs are to take in committees and in the Chamber.

When members are not in the Riksdag they are usually at home in their constituencies or involved in political activities at an international level. Being an MP is no nine-to-five job, members are expected to make themselves continuously available to a wide variety of stakeholders.

In their constituencies they meet local party members and participate in meetings in order to sound out opinion and attitudes. They meet citizens – personally and on the phone or by e-mail – as well as visiting workplaces and schools. They then communicate their impressions to their party groups in the Riksdag. MPs also write articles, appear in interviews and contribute to social media. They must also find time, for example, to work in parliamentary commissions, boards and in municipal and regional councils.



The former Second Chamber is used for various functions including meetings. The photo shows a meeting of the Social Democratic Party. The murals are by Axel Törneman.



## The committee – a Riksdag in miniature

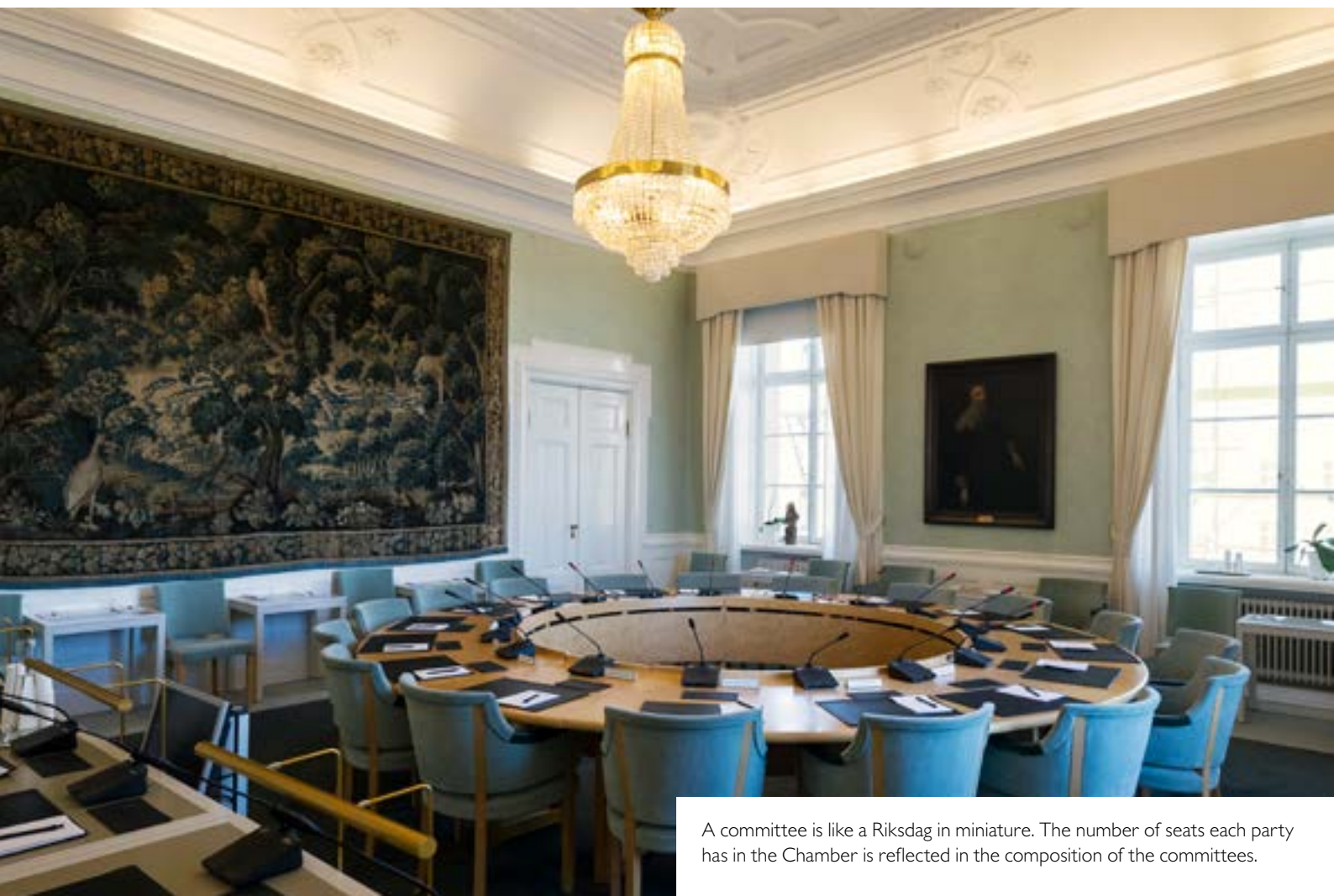
**ALL THE MATTERS** submitted to the Riksdag must be prepared in a committee before a decision can be taken in the Chamber. Consequently, a considerable part of Riksdag activities takes place in the committees. A committee is like a mini-Riksdag in that the number of seats each party has in the Chamber is reflected in the composition of the committees.

There are fifteen committees, each with responsibility for a particular policy area. At the beginning of the electoral period, the Riksdag appoints the members of these committees. There must be a minimum of fifteen ordinary members. Currently, the committees have seventeen ordinary members and at least as many deputy members. The committees elect a chair and a deputy chair. If the former represents the majority, the position of deputy goes to the opposition and vice versa. The Committee on the Constitution is charged with examining the work of the Government.

The chair is therefore usually a member representing the opposition.

Each committee has its own secretariat whose staff are politically impartial; consequently they retain their positions even if the political composition of the Riksdag changes.

For each new electoral period, the Chamber also appoints the members of the Committee on EU Affairs, the Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs and the Riksdag Board. The parties' representation in these bodies is also proportionate to the number of seats they have obtained in the parliamentary election. In the Committee on EU Affairs, members from the parliamentary parties discuss Sweden's EU policies with the Government. The Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs is a body for consultation on foreign policy between the Riksdag and the Government. The Riksdag Board leads the work of the Riksdag.



A committee is like a Riksdag in miniature. The number of seats each party has in the Chamber is reflected in the composition of the committees.

# The 15 parliamentary committees

**Committee on the Labour**

**Market:** labour market policy, working life policy, gender equality, integration and discrimination.

**Committee on Civil Affairs:**

marriage, consumer and housing policy and insurance issues.

**Committee on Finance:**

the central government budget and economic policy.

**Committee on Defence:**

military and civil defence, rescue services, nuclear safety and measures to reduce the vulnerability of society.

**Committee on Justice:**

the law courts, police service and prisons.

**Committee on the Constitu-**

**tion:** scrutiny of the work of the Government, Sweden's fundamental laws, legislation concerning radio and

television, and freedom of expression and formation of public opinion.

**Committee on Cultural Affairs:**

culture, youth activities, sport and religious communities.

**Committee on Environment and Agriculture:**

agriculture, forestry, hunting, fishing and nature conservation.

**Committee on Industry and**

**Trade:** industrial policy, industry, trade and energy policy.

**Committee on Taxation:**

taxes, bankruptcies and population registration.

**Committee on Social Insurance:**

benefits, allowances, sickness pay, social security contributions and migration.

**Committee on Health and**

**Welfare:** care of the elderly and people with disabilities, measures to deal with abuse and other social services issues, and health and medical care.

**Committee on Transport and Communications:**

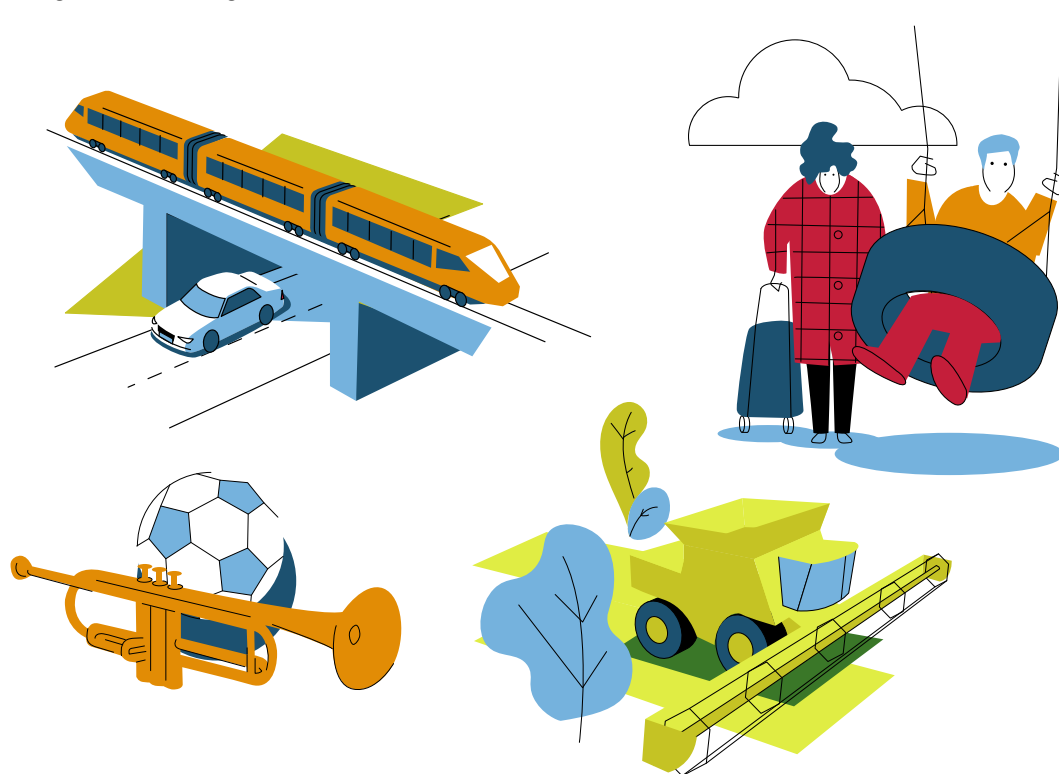
road and rail transport, air traffic, postal services, electronic communication and IT.

**Committee on Education:**

pre-schools, compulsory school and upper-secondary schools, school-age childcare, adult education, higher education and research and financial support for students.

**Committee on Foreign Affairs:**

relations with other states, development assistance to other countries and foreign trade.



Transport, care of the elderly, environment and culture are among the many areas the parliamentary committees are responsible for.



## Public hearings provide knowledge

**WHEN A COMMITTEE** needs more facts before adopting a position it usually invites experts who are

able to answer its questions to a hearing. Hearings are open to the public.



In January 2021, the Committee on Health and Welfare held a public hearing in connection with the Corona Commission's interim report Elderly care during the pandemic.

## Parliament – government interaction

### **AN ITEM OF PARLIAMENTARY BUSINESS**

often begins with a proposal from the Government (a Government bill). In the bill, the Government can propose a new law or an amendment to an existing law, often after a commission of inquiry has thoroughly examined the matter. The report is circulated for comment to various public agencies and organisations who are all given an opportunity to submit their views on conclusions and proposals.

The actual decisions, however, are taken by the Riksdag. The legislative proposals determined by the Riksdag cover a wide range of areas such as changes to maintenance allowances, how energy use is measu-

red in buildings and penalties for money laundering. On the basis of a proposal from the Government, the Riksdag also decides on taxation and determines the central government budget.

Furthermore the Riksdag influences foreign policy through the Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs, although the Government presents Sweden's views on foreign policy and takes the day-to-day decisions connected, for example, with the EU and the UN.

The Government is responsible for ensuring that the Riksdag's decisions are implemented and it issues regulations on how this is to be done. Such regulations are termed ordinances. However, responsibility



Side by side overlooking the waters of Stockholm. The Government Offices to the left and the Riksdag buildings on Helgeandsholmen to the right. The Riksdag adopts laws and ensures that the Government works in compliance with and implements the decisions.



then moves to the public administration. Municipalities, regions and central government agencies must ensure that decisions are implemented. This means that these agencies are responsible for ensuring that the citizens have access to fundamental services in society such as schools, healthcare and social care.

Central government agencies in Sweden are fairly large and autonomous in comparison to those of other countries. Although they report to the Government, they are not actually part of the Government Offices. Consequently the Government is not permitted to interfere in the way in which an agency, a local

authority or a court, for example, deals with a specific matter or case. This is termed ministerial rule and is prohibited in Sweden. The agencies themselves decide on the matters they have to deal with. If a minister is found to have interfered, he or she may be forced to resign.

Finally, it is the Riksdag's task to examine Government activities, to ensure that the Government carries out its responsibilities in accordance with existing laws and regulations, and that the decisions taken by the Riksdag are implemented in society.



Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson (Moderate Party) and Nooshi Dadgostar (Left Party) debating in the Chamber.

# How laws are passed

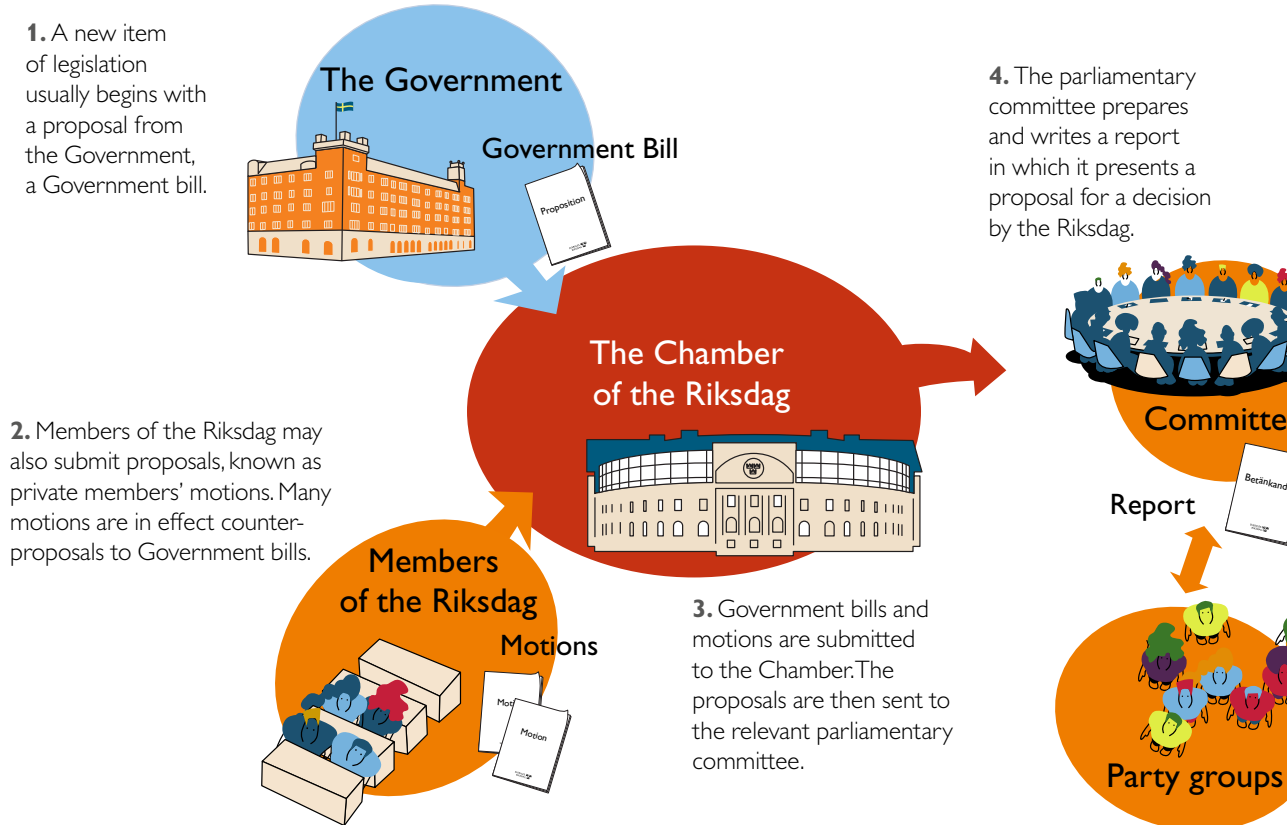
**ONLY THE RIKSDAG** can pass laws in Sweden, but it is normally the Government that initiates new legislation in the form of Government bills.

Before the Riksdag can take a decision on an item of legislation, the matter must be prepared by a committee which draws up a proposal. Environmental issues are prepared by the Committee on Environment and Agriculture, matters relating to schools are dealt with by the Committee on Education, matters relating to libraries are prepared by the Committee on Cultural Affairs, and so on. In connection with the committee's consideration of a matter, MPs and the parliamentary party group have an opportunity to submit their views on the Government's proposals and to suggest changes or additions by introducing motions.

## IMPORTANT TO BE WELL PREPARED

When the MPs start their discussions in a committee, it is important that they are well prepared and acquainted with the opinions of experts and the public on the matter. It is also important to know what party colleagues around the country think. In addition, the MPs consult their own party groups before deciding how to proceed in their committees.

A committee may also contact experts at public authorities and other organisations in order to obtain as wide a view as possible. Sometimes this is done by holding a hearing, which is usually open to the public. Ordinary committee meetings, however, are held behind closed doors.





Matters relating to research and the future, as well as evaluation of Riksdag decisions are integrated into the daily work of the Riksdag.

Committee considerations are concluded with a committee report which describes the matter and the majority proposal for a decision by the Riksdag.

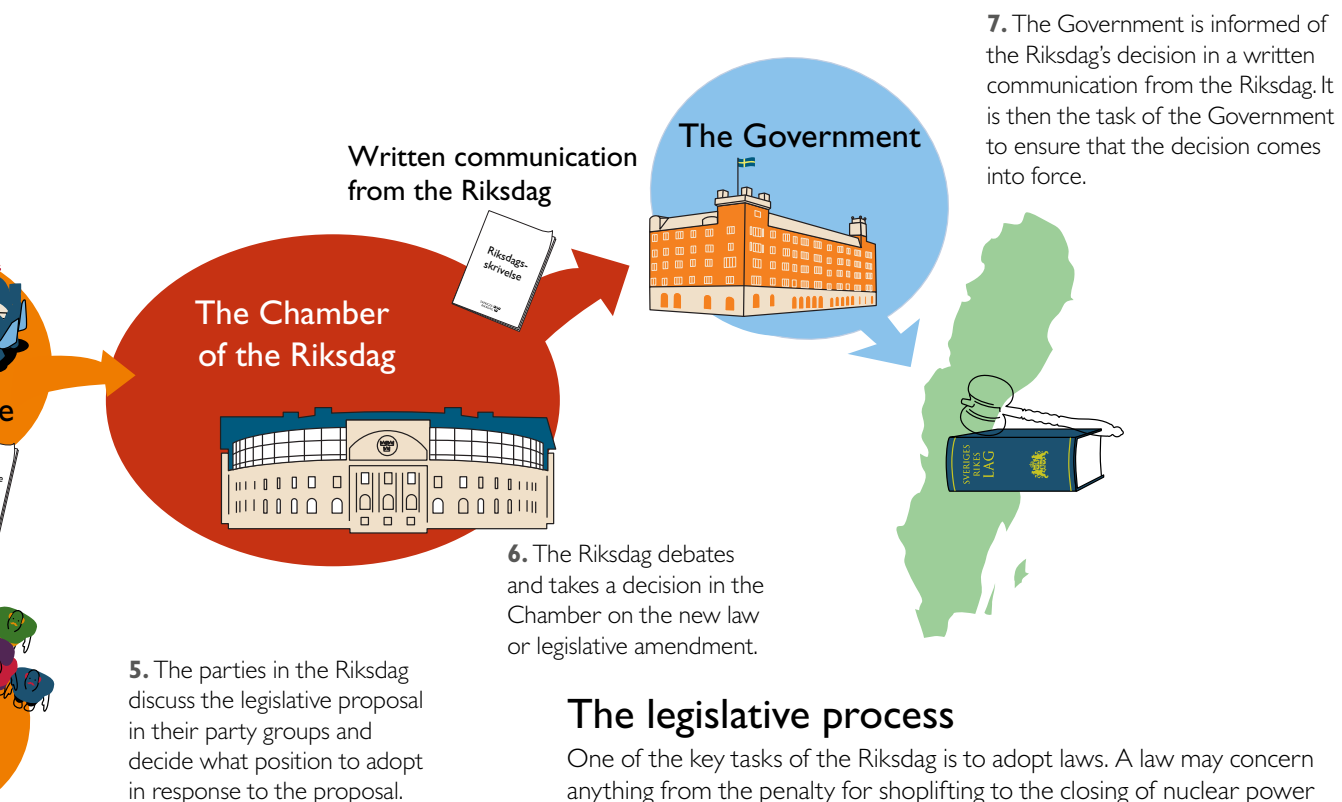
The members of a committee who do not support the proposal often submit reservations, in which they present what they think should be done instead and state the reasons for their opinions. These reservations are included in the committee report.

#### OPEN DEBATE IN THE CHAMBER

Once the report has been submitted to the Riksdag, the members have a few days in which to read it before it is dealt with in the Chamber. Since the mat-

ter has already been considered by a committee and controversial issues have been discussed by the party groups, there may be relatively few members present in the Chamber during the actual debate. But debates are important nevertheless; all the meetings of the Chamber are open to the public, and representatives of the various parties then have an opportunity to give an account of their opinions and explain their positions.

Debates on committee reports sometimes end with a vote but, if the parties are agreed on a matter, the Riksdag can make a decision without holding a debate or a vote.



## The legislative process

One of the key tasks of the Riksdag is to adopt laws. A law may concern anything from the penalty for shoplifting to the closing of nuclear power stations. However, the Riksdag's decisions can also deal with other matters such as the central government budget or international security routines.

## Working with the budget

**ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT TASKS** of the Riksdag is to make decisions about the central government budget, including central government expenditure and revenue for the coming year. The budget process starts when the Government presents its Spring Fiscal Policy Bill to the Riksdag in April. This Bill contains an assessment of the economic situation and proposes guidelines for Sweden's economic and budget policies.

The most important bill during the year is the Budget Bill, which the Government generally presents in September. In an election year, however, the Budget Bill may be presented a few weeks later. The Budget Bill sets out the Government's proposals for total central government expenditure for the coming year and how it is to be distributed. The opposition parties and individual MPs then have an opportunity to present counter-proposals.

### THOUSANDS OF MOTIONS

At the same time, members of the Riksdag may submit proposals on any other topic on which the Riksdag may decide. This occurs during the general private members' motions period which begins in

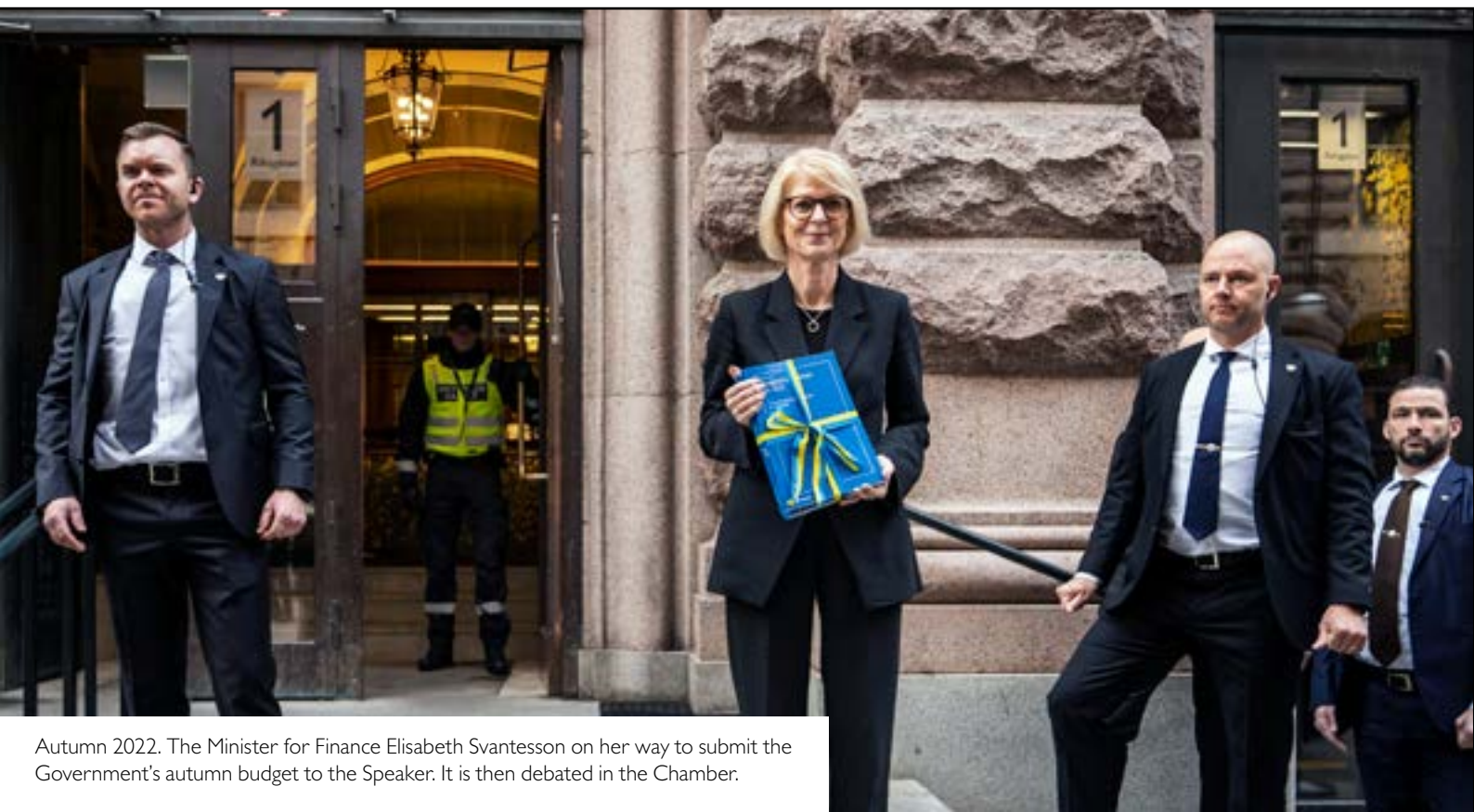
connection with the opening of the Riksdag session and ends two weeks after the Budget Bill has been presented by the Government. In total, the MPs, individually or together with other members, introduce several thousand motions during this period.

### 27 EXPENDITURE AREAS

The budget process continues throughout the autumn. In November the Riksdag establishes a fixed ceiling for total expenditure for the following year. The members then decide how expenditure is to be distributed within the 27 expenditure areas into which the budget is divided.

The expenditure areas are then dealt with by the relevant committee. For example the Committee on Finance coordinates work on the budget while the Committee on Industry and Trade is responsible for regional growth.

Expenditure areas are, in turn, sub-divided into a total of approximately 500 appropriations. In December the Riksdag works with the allocation of funding to these different appropriations. Decisions are normally made before the end of the year as the budget comes into force on 1 January.



Autumn 2022. The Minister for Finance Elisabeth Svantesson on her way to submit the Government's autumn budget to the Speaker. It is then debated in the Chamber.





The Minister for Finance Elisabeth Svantesson submits the Government's autumn budget to the Speaker Andreas Norlén



The printed autumn budget for 2023.



Martin Ådahl (Centre Party).



Janine Alm Ericson (Green Party).

# Control of political power

**ACCORDING TO SWEDEN'S CONSTITUTION** the Riksdag has the task of examining the Government and the public administration. This task is designed to help the Government and central government agencies to work in an efficient manner, in conformity with the rule of law. A further aim is to help citizens feel that they can trust those in power. Parliamentary control is an important aspect of democracy and serves to protect individual citizens from abuse of power and mismanagement of tax revenues.

## ASKS THE GOVERNMENT

Questions and interpellations to ministers are one instrument of parliamentary control. Once a week members of the Riksdag can address questions to various ministers for one hour in the Chamber and receive direct answers. Members can also put their questions in writing and receive written answers. An interpellation is a written question which is answered in writing by a minister and then debated in the Chamber. Both questions and interpellations can concern something a minister has said or done in various contexts. The member asking the question may want to know how far the Government has come in its consideration of a matter or what measures may be expected in a specific case.

## PROPOSES SCRUTINY

The Committee on the Constitution examines the Government and its ministers. Any member of the Riksdag can report a matter to the Committee on the Constitution concerning the way in which ministers have fulfilled their responsibilities rather than actual Government policy. The Committee on the Constitu-

**Press, radio and television** reporters also play an important role in examining the Government and public administration. They often carry out investigations of their own and draw public attention to errors and shortcomings. MPs can respond by addressing these issues directly with the Government, for example during Question Time in the Chamber.

tion determines which matters are to be scrutinised and this enables the Committee to question ministers, officials or anyone else who has been involved. Usually such hearings are open to the public; they are sometimes broadcast live on radio and television.

The Committee on the Constitution formulates its conclusions in a report that may then be debated in the Chamber.

## EXPRESSES LACK OF CONFIDENCE

If the Riksdag no longer has confidence in a minister, members of the Riksdag can call for a declaration of no confidence. Over half the MPs must vote in favour if a vote of no confidence is to lead to a minister being forced to resign. If a declaration of no confidence is directed against the Prime Minister, the entire Government must resign.

## SCRUTINISES PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

There are two authorities reporting to the Riksdag whose task it is to scrutinise the public administration. The older of these is the Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman which examines whether the public authorities and their employees comply with existing legislation and other statutes during the performance of their responsibilities. This office also follows up complaints from the public, carries out inspections of public authorities and conducts other examinations on its own initiative. The municipalities and regions are also examined by the Parliamentary Ombudsmen.

The National Audit Office is primarily responsible for examining the way in which central government funds are used and how efficient public authorities are in the performance of their tasks. It is up to the National Audit Office to decide what is to be examined, how to conduct its examinations and what conclusions to draw.

The Parliamentary Ombudsmen and the Auditors General are chosen by the Riksdag.





Hearing in the Committee on the Constitution with the former Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson (Social Democratic Party) in April 2021.

## The EU – a part of everyday life

**IT IS NOT ONLY THE RIKSDAG** that makes decisions concerning the laws that are to apply in Sweden. Through Sweden's membership of the European Union (EU) the Riksdag has transferred some of its decision-making authority to the EU. However, at the same time as the EU institutions prepare the various decisions, the member states work with the same issues – and the Riksdag is a part of this process.

Nowadays EU issues concern most policy areas. Even areas that were previously managed within the country, such as foreign policy, now have a European dimension.

Work with EU issues is managed in various ways in the Chamber, in the parliamentary committees and in the Committee on EU Affairs. The Riksdag also cooperates with the parliaments of the other EU countries to exchange experience and information.

The Government establishes EU policies and the Riksdag exercises its influence through the Government. However, the Government must gain acceptance for its policies in the Riksdag and ensure majority support. The Government is also obliged to provide information to the Riksdag on a regular basis, both verbally and in writing.

### DEBATES IN THE CHAMBER

Debates on EU issues in the Chamber give all MPs the opportunity to examine the Government's work with these issues. Such debates, which are open to the public are, for example, held when the Government answers interpellations and at Question Time. EU issues are also debated when the Government reports back from EU summits. A special EU debate is arranged once a year.

Furthermore, the Government presents a written, annual report of its EU activities to the Riksdag. This report then leads to a debate in the Chamber.

### COMMITTEES PARTICIPATE AT AN EARLY STAGE

The Riksdag's fifteen parliamentary committees are tasked to monitor what is happening in the EU within their specific areas of responsibility. The Riksdag

adopts positions on proposals and ideas at an early stage in the process. Committee meetings are usually not open to the public.

The committees ensure the application of the principle of subsidiarity which was introduced in the Lisbon Treaty of 2009. This principle states that decisions are to be made at the most appropriate level, whether at supranational, national or local level.

The committees also examine the consultation documents established by the European Commission with the aim of creating debate and exploring countries' opinions. These are known as green or white papers. The committees then write statements that are considered in the Chamber. In addition, the committees examine all EU proposals very early on in the process in order to determine the matters that will become the subject of consultations with the Government.

### THE GOVERNMENT MUST GAIN APPROVAL

The members of the Committee on EU Affairs meet the representatives of the Government once a week. The Committee on EU Affairs has the same political composition as the parliamentary committees. The Government consults this Committee on the matters that the EU Council of Ministers will make decisions on in Brussels the following week.

Consultation means that the Government must seek the Riksdag's approval to adopt a certain position in the Council of Ministers. Prior to meetings between heads of state and government in the European Council (EU summits), the Prime Minister consults the Committee on EU Affairs. These consultations are broadcast via the Riksdag webcast service.

Afterwards the Riksdag examines the Government's EU policy and can, if necessary, criticise the Government. Ultimately the Riksdag can force an individual minister or the entire Government to resign if policies go against the wishes of the majority of MPs.





Above: The first meeting of the Committee on EU Affairs after the election 2022.  
Left: There are 705 members of the European Parliament of which 21 are Swedish.



## International contacts

**WITH THE INCREASING IMPORTANCE** of the international perspective, the Riksdag's involvement in foreign affairs has expanded. Many political issues require cross-border cooperation and foreign policy is often debated in the Chamber of the Riksdag.

The Riksdag participates in the establishment of foreign policy together with the Government. At the beginning of the year a foreign policy debate is held in the Riksdag and the Minister for Foreign Affairs presents Sweden's foreign policy to the MPs. During the rest of the year, the Government consults the Riksdag Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs.

In a few cases it is the Riksdag that takes foreign policy decisions and in these cases, the matter is first prepared by the Committee on Foreign Affairs. The Riksdag's decision-making areas include which countries Sweden sends peacekeeping forces to and what percentage of the gross national income should be spent on development cooperation.

On account of Sweden's membership of the European Union, the Riksdag also maintains lively contacts with other member states. Cooperation concerning legislation has become a part of the day-to-day activities of the Riksdag committees.

### LIVELY, CROSS-BORDER CONTACTS

The Riksdag receives a large number of foreign guests and delegations every year. In addition, the Speaker and Deputy Speakers, MPs and the committees themselves all venture out into the world to exchange experience, provide information and create and maintain their contact networks.

The Speakers meet speakers and presidents of other parliaments, heads of state, ministers and representatives of international organisations such as the UN.

MPs' international contacts generally occur within parliamentary assemblies such as the Nordic Council or the Council of Europe. The Riksdag is also involved in supporting new democracies and MPs are sent to observe elections all over the world. In addition, MPs form part of Swedish government delegations to various UN meetings.

MPs from different parties often form associations on the basis of a personal commitment to a specific foreign policy issue, for example environmental problems or global food supply. Several friendship associations with other countries and regions have also been formed within the Riksdag.







The Speaker Andreas Norlén received the President of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic Markéta Pekarová Adamová and her delegation in May 2022.



On 18 November 2020, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, leader of the opposition in Belarus, visited the Riksdag. She participated in meetings and met members of the Riksdag from various parties.



In March 2022 the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressed the members of the Swedish Parliament via link.



Tillie Martinussen, Greenland and Kasper Roug, Denmark at a session of the Nordic Council in the Swedish Parliament.

## The Riksdag – much older than universal suffrage

**SINCE THE MIDDLE AGES** there has been some form of parliament in Sweden. The right to vote, however, is historically a considerably more recent element in Swedish society. During the 19th century, nationwide elections were introduced to choose representatives to the Riksdag; initially, voting was only open to certain limited groups of people. Gradually, however, the right to vote was extended and in 1909 the Riksdag adopted a reform which brought universal suffrage for men. In 1919–21 the Riksdag decided to make the right to vote universal and equal for both women and men in Sweden. The same reform gave everyone who had the right to vote eligibility to stand for parliament.

### STEP BY STEP

Developments have occurred gradually up until the current political system with a parliament elected by the people and a parliamentary democracy. Developing from the Things of medieval freemen, coun-

cil meetings, Diets of noblemen, and market assemblies, via Gustav Vasa's first national assemblies with representatives of all four Estates – Nobility, Clergy, Burghers and Peasantry – the Riksdag became a firmer institution in the 17th century. A clear division of power was introduced between the King, the Council and the four Estates.

In 1617 Sweden passed its first written Riksdag Act, which regulated the procedures of the Riksdag of the day and determined how its business should be dealt with. The 17th century also saw the development of the system of government bills, proposals submitted by the King to the Riksdag. The Riksdag appointed committees consisting of representatives of the four Estates to negotiate briefing materials on which decisions could be based. Since the 16th century, the Estates and the members of the Riksdag had also had a limited right to submit motions, i.e. their own political proposals.

The Members' Building, handwritten parliamentary record from the Riksdag of the Estates and the inauguration of the sculpture "Come as you are" by Astrid Göransson.





However, there have also been periods of autocratic royal power. During the Carolinian autocracy of 1680–1718, Karl XI and Karl XII reigned without regard to the Council of the Realm or the Riksdag. This was also true for most of Gustav III's reign (1771–92). Between 1718 and 1772 the Riksdag governed the country. Two groupings arose in the Riksdag of the Estates – the Hats and the Caps – who alternated in power in a way rather similar to the present-day parliamentary system.

#### **POWER DIVIDED**

In 1809 Sweden adopted a new Constitution based on the division of powers. The Instrument of Government stipulated how power was to be divided between the King, the Riksdag and the executive bodies. Courts and public agencies and authorities were given autonomous status. The Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman was also created. In 1810 a new

Riksdag Act was passed. Since then the Constitution has been amended twice; in 1974 and in 2010. In 1866 a representational reform was implemented, marking the end of the Riksdag of the Estates and its replacement with a bicameral system. The present-day unicameral system was introduced in 1971.

1909	All men get the right to vote
1919	All women get the right to vote
1921	Sweden holds its first parliamentary election with equal suffrage for women and men
1922	Five women become members of parliament



## Support, service and transparency

**THE RIKSDAG ADMINISTRATION** is an authority under the Riksdag whose task is to facilitate parliamentary operations. Its approximately 630

employees assist the MPs with expert knowledge, provide background information and ensure that the MPs enjoy good working conditions.



Officials from the Riksdag Administration working during a debate in the Chamber.



The Riksdag Library provides services for the MPs, but is also open to the public. Here a librarian shows a student the parliamentary documents.



The media technicians are responsible for webcasts from the Chamber.





**1** East Wing of the Riksdag **2** West Wing of the Riksdag **3** Public entrance Riksgatan 3  
**4** Members' Building **5** Neptunus Complex **6** Cephalus Complex **7** Riksdag Library



# The Swedish Parliament

This brochure is also available in Swedish and easy Swedish. The brochures may be downloaded or ordered free of charge from the Riksdag website [www.riksdagen.se](http://www.riksdagen.se) or from Riksdagens tryckeriexpedition:

**E-mail** [order.infomaterial@riksdagen.se](mailto:order.infomaterial@riksdagen.se)

**Telephone** +46 8 786 58 10

## Do you have any questions about the Riksdag or the EU?

Please contact the Information Service:

**E-mail** [riksdagsinformation@riksdagen.se](mailto:riksdagsinformation@riksdagen.se)

**Telephone** 020 349 000

**Web** [www.riksdagen.se](http://www.riksdagen.se)

**Twitter** @Sverigesriksdag

**Instagram** @sveriges\_riksdag

**YouTube** Sveriges riksdag