



The House of
Representatives

The House of Representatives Bodies: the President

General

The President represents the House of Representatives as an institution. He manages and coordinates the work of the House in consultation with the presidents of the political groups. He has wide competences for this purpose, which are set out in the Rules of Procedure. The President of the House of Representatives is chosen from among the politicians who have considerable experience in the political arena. He must be able to get groups working together even if they have divergent points of view.

Election of the President and the Bureau

The first session of the House of Representatives after the elections is chaired by the outgoing President or, for lack of him, the member with the greatest length of service. The four youngest representatives assist him in this task. Together they form the “Provisional Bureau” of the House.

After verification of the credentials (during which the House checks the regularity of the elections), the House of Representatives then elects a “Definitive Bureau”.

The Bureau consists of:

- the President
- maximum five vice-presidents
- maximum four secretaries

The presidents of the recognized political groups also form part of the Bureau. The political groups which amount at least 12 members and have no President, vice-president or secretary sitting on the Bureau, can appoint an additional member.

According to the Rules of Procedure, the President and the other members of the Bureau are elected by the plenary assembly.

It is the tradition for the President of the House of Representatives to come from one of the parties forming the government coalition⁽¹⁾. On three occasions only in the history of the House has a member of the opposition been the President⁽²⁾. The first vice-president belongs in principle to a different language group than that of the President.

The Bureau is elected for the duration of a session (which starts on the second Tuesday of October and ends on the second Tuesday of October of the following year). In practice the composition of the Bureau remains the same for the entire duration of the parliamentary term (four years, except in the event of the House of Representatives being dissolved early).

⁽¹⁾ The current President of the House is Mr H. De Croo. He is part of the Flemish Liberal Democratic Party (VLD)

⁽²⁾ E. Brunet in 1921; F. Van Cauwelaert in 1946; A. Van Acker in 1966.

⁽³⁾ After very serious incidents in the House, Presidents Guillery (in 1881) and de Lantsheere (in 1884) resigned.

Resignation of the President

It is extremely rare for a President to resign during a parliamentary term. It did however happen on some occasions in the nineteenth century⁽³⁾.

Competences of the President

— The role of the President is to maintain order during the plenary session and to have the Rules of Procedure observed. He ensures for example that the speakers observe the speaking time allowed to them.

The President may call a deputy to order. If a deputy is subject to a second call to order, he may not speak for the rest of the session. The President may also propose that a deputy is expelled. The assembly decides on this expulsion by standing and sitting⁴.

— He assesses the admissibility of the texts, motions and other proposals.

— The President asks questions and submits them to the vote. The President may only speak in a debate to present the state of affairs of an issue. If he wants to participate in the debate, he must leave the presidential seat and take his own seat in the House. The President does however participate in the vote.

— He announces the results of the votes and the decisions of the House.

— He is the spokesman of the House of Representatives.

— The President may request the advice of the Council of State, legislation section, on all Bills and Private Member's Bills, as well as on the amendments.

— The President manages a certain number of committees. He chairs the Committee on bookkeeping, the advisory Committee on European affairs, etc.

List of Presidents of the House since 1831

E.C. de Gerlache	10.09.1831	18.07.1832
J. Raikem	10.11.1832	24.05.1839
J. Fallon	18.11.1839	10.09.1842
J. Raikem	09.10.1842	06.04.1843
C. Liedts	17.11.1843	20.05.1848
P.T. Verhaegen	28.06.1848	03.04.1852
N.J.A. Delfosse	26.10.1852	24.04.1855
J. De Lehay	25.04.1855	13.06.1857
P.T. Verhaegen	17.12.1857	30.05.1859
A.E.P. Orts	19.07.1859	18.07.1860
D. Vervoort	23.11.1860	27.05.1863
E. Vanden Peereboom	15.12.1863	23.08.1867
H. Dolez	23.10.1867	20.05.1870
Vicomte Ch. Vilain XIII	11.08.1870	26.07.1871
X. Thibault	15.11.1871	29.05.1878
Ch. Rogier	01.08.1878	26.08.1878
J. Guillery	13.11.1878	10.03.1881
J. Descamps	22.03.1881	17.05.1884
X. Thibaut	23.07.1884	02.09.1884
T. de Lantsheere	12.11.1884	25.11.1895
A. Beernaert	30.01.1895	07.05.1900
L. de Sadeleer	18.07.1900	08.11.1901
F. Schollaert	12.11.1901	09.01.1908
G. Cooreman	16.01.1908	08.08.1912
F. Schollaert	12.11.1912	29.06.1917
P. Pouillet	28.11.1918	13.10.1919
E. Brunet	10.12.1919	06.08.1928
E. Tibbaut	16.08.1928	05.09.1930
J. Poncelet	11.11.1930	13.04.1936
C. Huysmans	23.06.1936	06.03.1939
F. Van Cauwelaert	21.04.1939	12.03.1954
C. Huysmans	27.04.1954	11.11.1958
P. Kronacker	11.11.1958	17.04.1961
A. Van Acker	18.04.1961	30.04.1974
A. Dequae	30.04.1974	07.06.1977
E. Leburton	07.06.1977	03.04.1979
Ch.F. Nothomb	03.04.1979	18.05.1980
J. Defraigne	20.05.1980	24.10.1980
J. Michel	24.10.1980	18.12.1981
J. Defraigne	18.12.1981	19.01.1988
E. Vankeirsbilck	19.01.1988	10.05.1988
Ch.F. Nothomb	10.05.1988	24.11.1991
Ch.F. Nothomb	24.11.1991	21.05.1995
J. Dupré	08.06.1995	28.06.1995
R. Langendries	28.06.1995	01.07.1999
H. De Croo	01.07.1999	

⁽⁴⁾ The first deputy to be expelled was a deputy from Liège, excluded on 21 January 1898. On 26 November 1959, the head of the socialists, Van Eynde, was also expelled.