

The Norwegian Parliament



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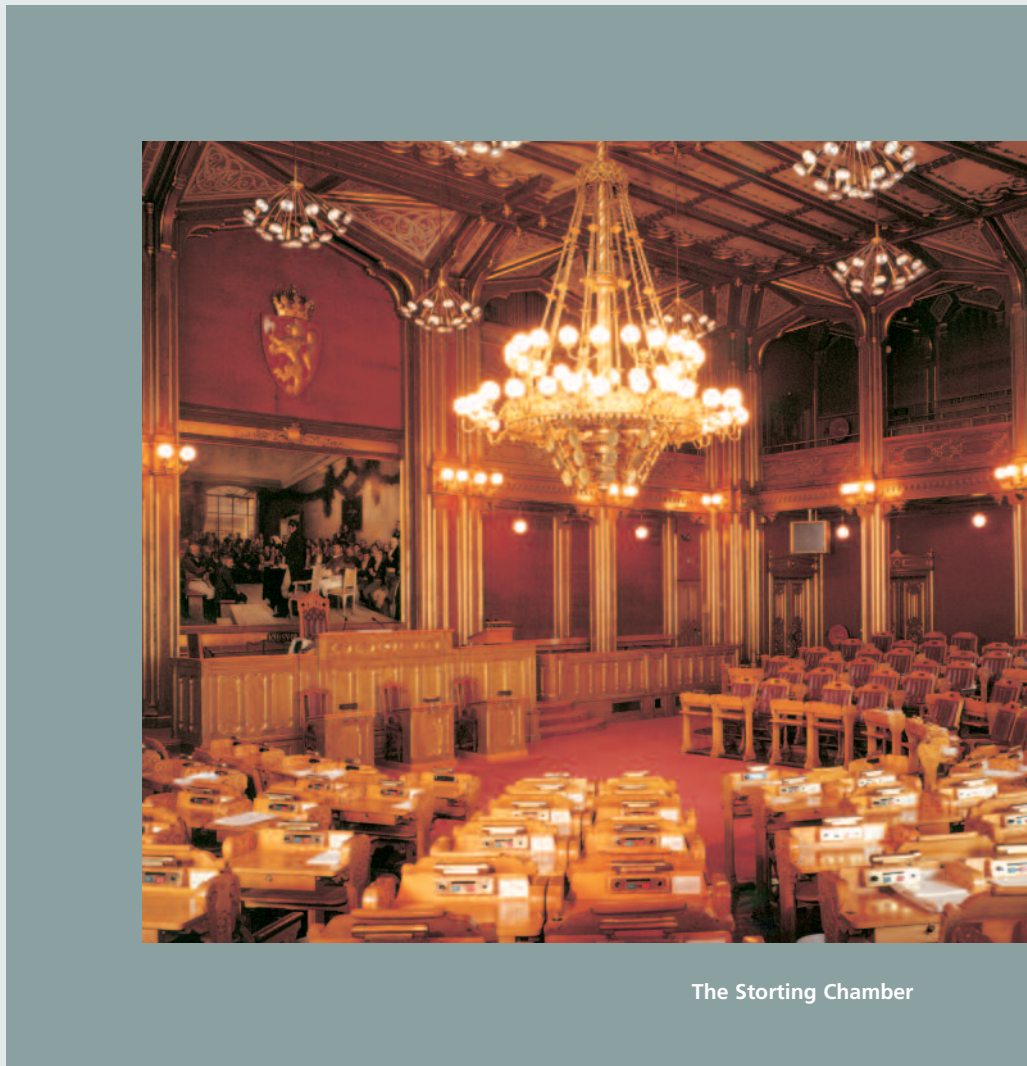
“The people exercises the Legislative Power through the Storting”

The Constitution of 1814 separated power between the executive power (the King); the legislative, budgetary and supervisory power (the Storting); and the judicial power (the courts).

The constitutional struggle during the 1870s and 1880s prepared the way for our current parliamentary system, which regulates the relationship between the Storting and the Government. The King lost his personal power and the Government took over the role of executive power. The Government became responsible to our elected representatives, the Storting. Our representative democracy is dependent on the existence of different political parties that submit electoral lists and on our use of our right to vote.

For most Norwegians, the word Storting is pregnant with meaning. People associate it with many different things: the distinctive building surmounting Løvebakken, the Constitution, the parliamentary system, the assembly of elected representatives, laws and budgets, Question Time, political debates and TV transmissions, the system of government, and social studies classes at school.

The Storting is a democratic and accessible social institution. The purpose of this booklet is to provide a broad presentation of our national assembly. Our democracy builds upon social participation by young and old alike. With both voter participation and political recruitment on the decrease, it is important to raise awareness of our democratic system of government.



The Storting Chamber

In order to take part, gain influence and appreciate the value of making the effort, one must know the rules. We hope that this booklet will provide answers to many of the

questions that may be asked about the functions and working of the Storting.



The Storting has the legislative, budgetary and supervisory power in Norway, and consists of 169 elected members.

The history of the Storting building



The Storting Building
Karl Johans gate at the end of the 1920s

The Storting consists today of a number of buildings, but this has not always been so.

The Storting's premises 1814–1866

The constituent assembly of 1814 held its meetings in the main building of the manor at Eidsvoll, the home of the owner of the iron works, Carsten Anker. The manor buildings are now protected as a national monument, the Eidsvoll Constitution Hall. Today, the buildings are looked after by the Eidsvoll 1814 foundation, which was set up by the Storting in 1998.

From autumn 1814 until 1854, the Storting was housed in the premises of the Christiania Cathedral School on the corner of Tollbugata and Dronningens gate, where Oslo's main post office now stands.

The old assembly hall can now be found at the Norwegian Folk Museum at Bygdøy. From 1854 to 1866, meetings of the Storting were held in the university banqueting hall, where there was more room for the plenary sessions.

New Storting building 1866

The formal opening of the present Storting building on 5 March 1866 was an event of national importance. Thirty years of contention in matters of architecture and

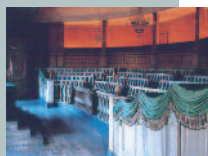
Eidsvoll

The Eidsvoll Constitution Hall, formerly the home of Carsten Anker. Drawing by F. Gjøs.

1814



7 October
1814



1854

The old Storting Chamber
(Christiania Cathedral School).

The University

The Old Banqueting Hall in the University's Domus Academica, also known as the Clock Building.

1857



Architectural competition
Schirmer and von Hanno's winning design.

“Langlet blended a number of distinctive elements into a fresh and innovative work of architecture, in which functional considerations in particular played a determining role. [...] The Lombardic-Romanesque style employed by Langlet was new and had a revolutionary effect because the building as a whole had no known antecedent. The idea that the principal building of the new Norwegian state could stand as a symbol of freedom and independence from tradition and from the past was an appealing one.”
(Ulf Hamran in Norges kunsthistorie, Vol. 4, 1981.)

location, with political as well as personal overtones, had gone into its construction.

In 1854 the Norwegian government in Stockholm decided that the building was to be set up on the site it now occupies, and this decision was later approved by the Storting.

A number of designs had been discussed and rejected when, in 1857, the Swedish architect Emil Victor Langlet (1824–98) submitted a design that attracted widespread attention, and which clearly appealed to a majority of the members of the Storting. On 18 May 1860, it was decided by a vote of 59 to 47 to approve this design. The style of the building was based on an integration of elements derived from Italian and Scandinavian traditions.

Work on the construction was begun on 3 August 1860 and continued for almost five and a half years. The new Storting building was formally opened on 5 March 1866. After a number of years, the magnificent building proved too small for the growing needs of the Storting and proposals for extensions were made.

Alterations and new premises

During the years from 1951–59, major alterations were made to the Storting building. The construction work was

planned and administered by the architect Nils Holter, who had won an architectural competition held by the Storting in 1950. The jury described Holter’s winning design as “in a class of its own as a very mature and executable design”. The work was carried out in three stages. The Storting Chamber was refurbished and extended and a new, modern four-storey office building facing Akersgata was erected in 1956.

Recent years have also seen further, to some extent major, alterations. To meet the need for more offices and conference rooms, the Storting purchased Prinsens gate 26 in 1972, Akersgata 21 in 1988, Nedre Vollgate 20 in 1993, Nedre Vollgate 18 in 1997 and Tollbugata 31 in 1999. In Akersgata 18, the Storting rents premises for a committee building.

*The Storting 10 October 1861
The laying of the foundation stone*



The building contract

By 59 to 47 votes, the Storting decided to award the building contract to Emil Victor Langlet.

1860



1860-
1866



5 March
1866



1950-
1959



Construction work

Langlet’s drawing from 1857, towards Karl Johans gate.

Formal opening

The new Storting building was formally opened at 12 noon on 5 March 1866.

Alterations

Planned and administered by the architect Nils Holter. Office building facing Akersgata, completed 1956.

The Storting Chamber

“The Storting Chamber is one of the most delightful parliamentary chambers in Europe – intimate yet grand, unpretentious yet rich in detail. The architectural elements are of wood; after all, it is Norwegian. One recognizes motifs from stave churches as well as Viking ships.”
(Thomas This-Evensen.)

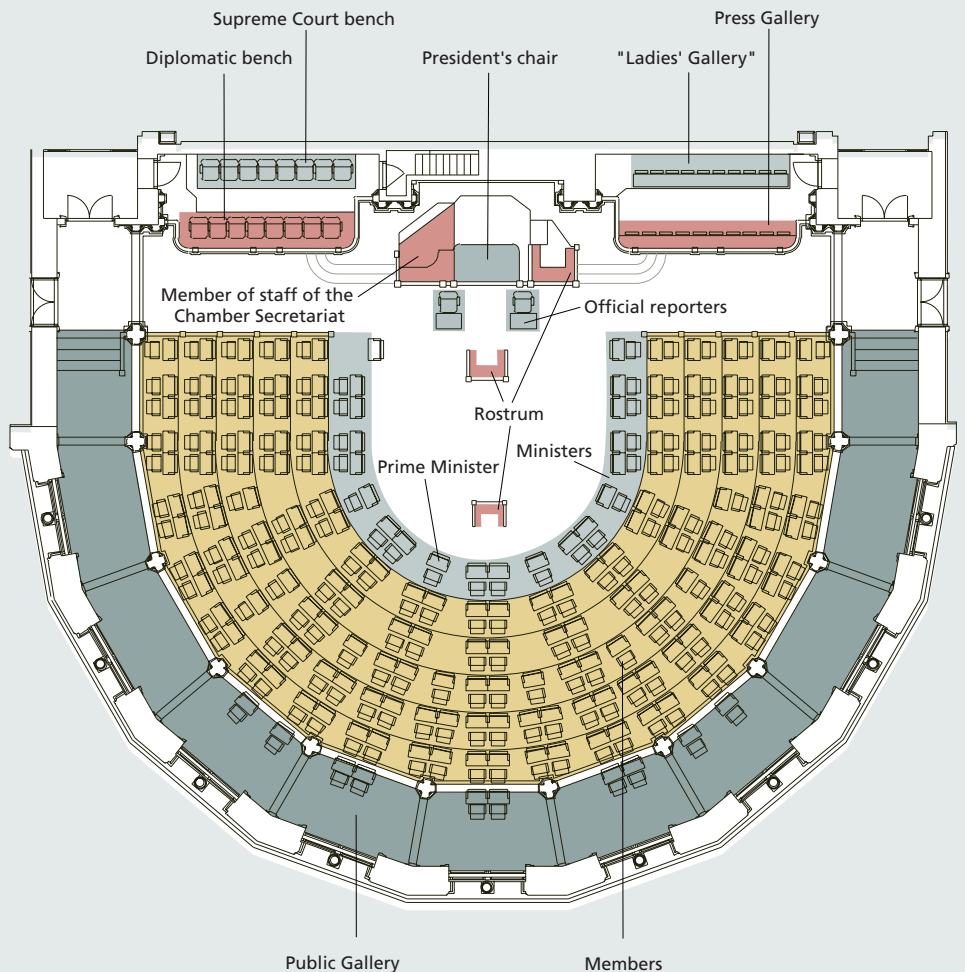
The Storting Chamber is constructed in the form of an amphitheatre with the President’s chair immediately under the famous painting of the Eidsvoll Convention of 1814, by Oscar Wergeland (1885). Above the painting hangs the coat of arms of the Kingdom of Norway.

The seats of the Members

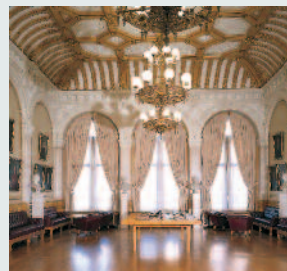
are arranged in a fan shape in the large semicircle. The Members are seated by electoral district (i.e. by county), with the counties arranged in alphabetical order. Within each county section, the seating order of the Members is based on the relative number of votes received in the election.

If you stand facing the President’s chair, the rostrum is to the right. To the left of the President sits a member of staff of the Chamber Secretariat who assists the President with lists of speakers, voting and rules. In front of them sit the official reporters. On the floor there are two rostrums. Furthest to the left is the diplomatic bench for guests and officials accompanying ministers. Immediately above it is the Supreme Court bench. At the far right is the Press Gallery and the so-called “Ladies’ Gallery” above it.

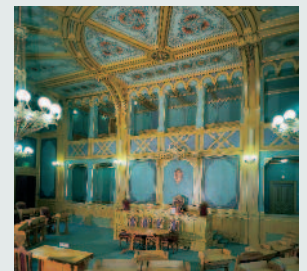
The ministers sit on the front bench in front of the members. The Government is not, as many people believe, located in the Storting building, but the ministers attend the Storting when matters that have bearing on their spheres of responsibility are being considered. The Public Gallery has room for approximately 150 visitors. The Storting building



The 7th June Room



The Eidsvoll Gallery



The Lagting Chamber

has a number of beautifully decorated rooms:

The 7th June Room

was originally known as “the Room for Deposited Matters”. The room has been restored to its original style. During the restoration, ten layers of paint were uncovered, and chemical analyses were made before deciding the design and colours to be used. The room is used for representation.

The Eidsvoll Gallery

which was formerly known as “the Storting’s Common Room”, was used as a reading and smoking room and later as a reception room. The room has been named after the 18 members of the Eidsvoll Convention whose pictures line its walls. There are also four large portraits of well known parliamentarians and prime ministers, Johan Sverdrup, “the father of parliamentarism”, President of the Storting Carl Berner and Prime Ministers Christian Michelsen and Gunnar Knudsen.

Article 68 of the Constitution Committee's 1814 draft of the Constitution (in revised form, the current article 67) was worded as follows: *"The Representatives thus elected shall constitute the Storting of the Kingdom of Norway."*

In Nicolai Wergeland's "Confidential Letters" (Christiania, 1830), where he consistently refers to himself in the third person as P.W., he tells of the events at Eidsvoll: *"We thus have a new name for a legislative national assembly. In the committee there was some doubt as to whether this P.Wergeland's new designation could be used, [...] but, finally, it seemed better to the Committee than the "Allting" of Falsen and Adler's draft."*

Nicolai Wergeland
(1780-1848)



The large painting Eidsvold 1814 (1885) by Oscar Arnold Wergeland (1844–1910) is the only picture we have that portrays a scene from the meetings of the Eidsvoll Convention. It is probably the most well known historical painting in Norwegian art.

"Eidsvold 1814" is Wergeland's best known painting, and is regarded by art historians as his best work. The painting is well composed and thoroughly researched with an emphasis on achieving as close as possible likeness in the portraits as well as correctness of costumes and details of the interior. Wergeland attached particular importance to portraying the historical event as precisely and realistically as possible. The historical moment depicted by Wergeland is the moment when the Constitution was completed.

In the long, narrow assembly hall, 80 members of the Eidsvoll Convention are present. In the middle of the picture, standing on the podium in the foreground, is Christian Magnus Falsen, who is often referred to as "the father of the Constitution". On the right of Falsen sits the permanent secretary of the Eidsvoll Convention, District Recorder Wilhelm Frimann Koren Christie, wearing his uniform as a government official. Christie was to be President of the first extraordinary session of the Storting in autumn 1814, and acted as "defender of the Constitution" during the negotiations with Sweden in autumn 1814.



"Eidsvold 1814"
Oscar Arnold Wergeland (1885)

Besides this there are twelve busts of former Members of the Storting. After the major redecoration work carried out in 1959 and 1991, the Eidsvoll Gallery is one of the most beautiful rooms in the building.

The Lagting Chamber

is almost a miniature of the Storting Chamber, but is simpler and not so richly decorated. The choice of colours makes the room appear less "radiant", but it is nevertheless a magnificent room.

Art in the Storting

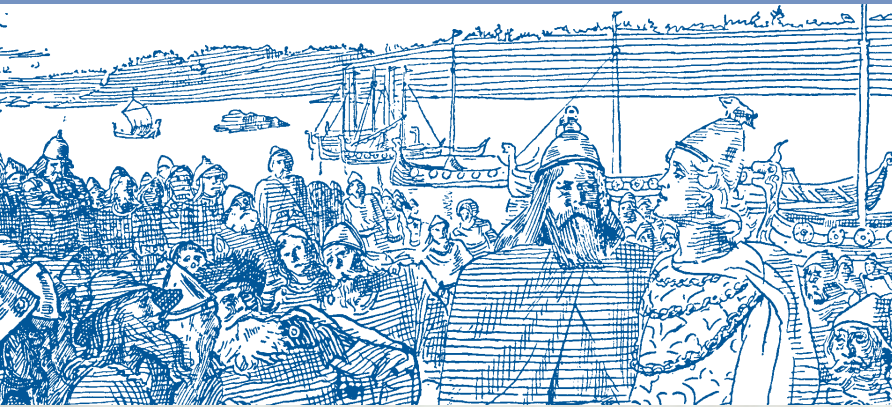
The Storting has a considerable art collection. The works of art have mainly been acquired in connection with special occasions, such as royal anniversaries and celebrations of the Constitution. Before making alterations in the 1950s, a competition was held to decide who should carry out the artistic decoration of the central parts of the building. In the course of the years, many portraits have been donated to the Storting by private individuals, organizations and others. In autumn 1990 the Committee for

Artistic Decoration of the Storting was established, and this committee is responsible for proposing purchases.

The collection includes a number of different art forms. There are approximately 350 prints and 200 paintings as well as ceramic art, textiles, drawings and sculptures. In addition, approximately 35 pictures are on loan from the National Gallery. Altogether around 700 works of art are housed in the Storting.

From bygdeting to Storting

King Håkon speaks at the Ting of the inhabitants of Trøndelag



The first picture of the Storting in 1866

The Storting, Norway's national assembly, was constituted at Eidsvoll in 1814, but its roots are far older.

Even before recorded history began in Scandinavia (around 800 AD), free men met in alltings (common assemblies) in the various districts scattered around the country, where they discussed legal and, to some extent, political matters of general concern. Later, during the Middle Ages, these tings, or assemblies, evolved into the local assemblies of rural districts and towns, and they acquired important functions in relations between the king and the common people.

Monarchy as a system of government has long traditions, and it was at specific regional assemblies that a pretender to the throne was customarily acclaimed king. Thus, from early times, the King received his lawful power from the people. When Norway was united as a kingdom (900–1030 AD), the first lagtings were constituted as superior regional assemblies. These were representative assemblies at which delegates from the various districts in each region met to award legal judgments and pass laws.

The first seeds of democratic evolution appeared in matters of law. The ancient regional assemblies, Frostating, Gulating and Eidsivating, were eventually joined into a single jurisdiction, and King Magnus Lagabøte (the Lawmender) (1263–80) had the existing body of law put into writing. This compilation of codified law (1274), which applied throughout the realm, was exceptional for its time, and remained in force until Frederik III, king of the Danish-

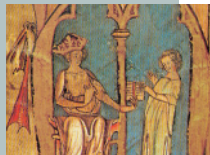
The forging of t

930-1030



"Håkon speaks at the Ting of the inhabitants of Trøndelag". (Snorre – Håkon the Good's Saga).

1274



King Magnus Lagabøte establishes the Landslov.

1660



Frederik III introduces absolute monarchy. The Dannebrog, the Danish-Norwegian merchant flag.

1814



The Eidsvoll Constitution Hall painted by Peder Balke.

10 April

“The events of 1814 in Norway are one of the strangest adventures of European history. A brief and eventful period of less than a year led via violent upheaval to enduring change. Those who, in November 1814, surfaced from the process they had entered in January, emerged in a different world than they had left. They felt that they had been seized by the mighty hand of world history, lifted up towards the heavens and placed in a new age...” (Jens Arup Seip in his Outline of Norwegian History, 1974.)



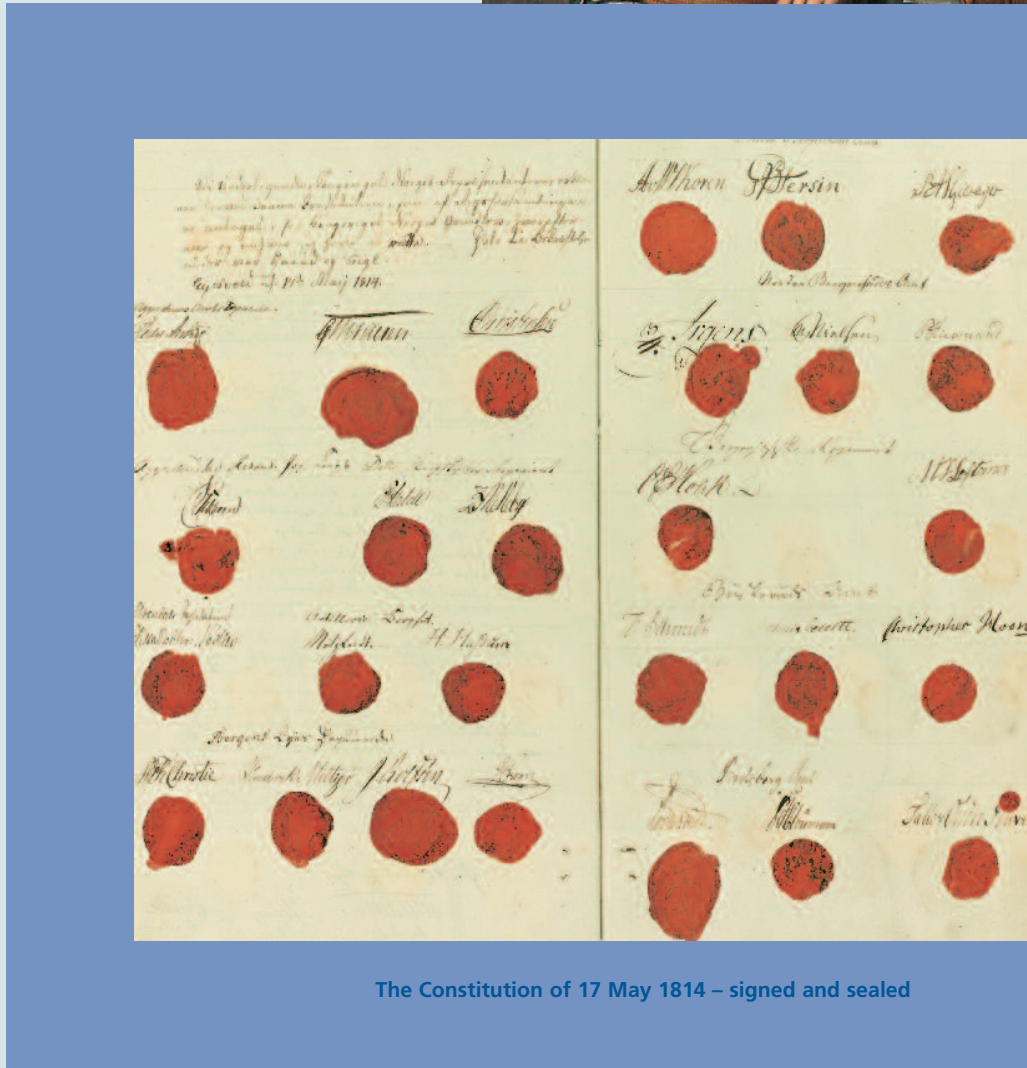
Christian Frederik
in full dress uniform. J. L. Lund (1813)

Norwegian union, promulgated absolute monarchy in 1660. This was codified in the King Act of 1665, which functioned as the constitution of the Union of Denmark–Norway until 1814.

In 1807, Sweden, Denmark and Norway were swept up into the Napoleonic Wars, which raged in full force on the Continent, with Denmark-Norway and Sweden on opposite sides of the conflict. Napoleon’s defeat in Russia in 1812 was the beginning of the end for the emperor and for the Union of Denmark-Norway.

Sweden sided with Napoleon’s adversaries, and the Great Powers promised the heir to the Swedish throne, Karl Johan, Norway if he joined them in subduing France. Following the decisive victory over Napoleon at the Battle of Leipzig in October 1813, Karl Johan hurried north to inflict a final defeat on Denmark. Frederik VI of Denmark yielded quickly and on 14 January 1814 he signed the Treaty of Kiel, ceding Norway to the King of Sweden.

The Danish Crown Prince Christian Frederik, who came to Norway in May 1813 as vice-regent, played a prominent role in the drama which subsequently unfolded in 1814. He refused to accept the Treaty of Kiel, and on 16 February 1814, called together the most influential men in Norway to an assembly at Eidsvoll, the purpose of which was to discuss Norway’s future. At this assembly, Christian Frederik was dissuaded from his original intention to assert his hereditary title to the throne of Norway and have himself acclaimed



The Constitution of 17 May 1814 – signed and sealed

king. The delegates to this assembly called for a liberal constitution and a new king to be chosen by the people. They decided that the people should elect deputies to a con-

stituent national assembly. The ideal of the sovereignty of the people had prevailed. It was further decided that “the people” should swear a solemn oath in church to

The Norwegian Constitution at Eidsvoll in 1814



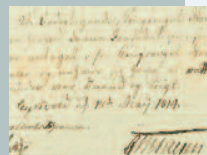
10 April-
11 May

The Eidsvoll Convention is assembled.



16 May

The Constitution is drafted. Proposal of the Constitutional Committee. Norwegian coat of arms 1814.



17 May

The Constitution is adopted. 110 articles.



20 May

The Constitution is signed. Christian Frederik is elected King of Norway.



The Eidsvoll Convention is dissolved. Norway now has a Constitution and a national assembly, the Storting.

The final meeting of the Eidsvoll Convention ends by the delegates joining hands and raising their voices with the cry, “United and faithful until the Mountains of Dovre should crumble!”.

The Eidsvoll Constitution Hall



The Eidsvoll Constitution Hall 19 May 1814
Peder Balke (1804–1887)

“defend Norway’s independence and risk life and blood for the beloved Fatherland”.

Each parish would then appoint electors who would elect delegates to the constituent assembly. Christian Frederik was to govern the country for the time being as regent.

The Eidsvoll Convention at Eidsvoll

Of the 112 representatives to the Constituent Assembly at Eidsvoll, 25 represented the towns, 33 represented the army and navy, and 54 represented the rural districts (amts). They included 37 land-owning farmers, 13

merchants, 5 industrialists and 57 government officials. Owing to its remoteness and the shortness of time, northern Norway was not represented. It was a young assembly that met at Eidsvoll; the average age was just over 42.

On Easter Sunday, 10 April 1814, the assembly attended the High Mass together. On the following day, the Prince Regent convened the Constituent Assembly. The Assembly had to work swiftly in order to draft and adopt a national constitution before the Great Powers could intervene. District Recorder Wilhelm Frimann Koren

Christie functioned as secretary throughout the proceedings, but they changed president each week. When the Eidsvoll Convention assembled, a number of drafts of the Constitution had been made. The draft of Christian Magnus Falsen and Johan Gunder Adler is regarded as the most important.

A Constitutional Committee with fifteen members was charged with making the final draft of Norway’s future constitution. On 16 April, the main principles were discussed and between 19 April and 11 May the final text of the Constitution was drafted.

The Assembly was divided into two main factions. The larger of the two groups, referred to as the independence party or “Prince Party” by its opponents, consisted of approximately 80 members in favour of full Norwegian independence. The smaller group, which was referred to as the unionist party or “Swedish Party”, consisted of approximately 30 members who considered that Norwegian independence was unrealistic, and were unwilling to take a stand until they were convinced that Norway was not entirely alone.

On 17 May, a final draft of the Constitution was signed. On the same day, Christian Frederik was unanimously elected King of a free, sovereign and independent Norway. On 19 May, the newly elected King presented himself to the Constituent Assembly and swore an oath on the Constitution. The Constituent Assembly held its last meeting the following day, and in closing, all the delegates joined hands and raised their voices with the cry, “United and faithful until the Mountains of Dovre should crumble!”.

With this, Norway had established its Constitution and founded its national assembly, the Storting.

The Constitution of 17 May 1814

The main principles of the Constitution were founded, for the most part, on the same ideals expressed in the American Declaration

Wilhelm Frimann Koren Christie – “the first real president of the Storting”:
“...he was an excellent administrator; quick-thinking and resolute, with great expertise and perceptivity. He had a ready wit and was capable of sarcasm, but was never confused and never lost his temper. When speech after speech had tangled together all the arguments and counter-arguments of a case or when proposals crossed one another in a difficult situation, he was able to calmly unravel the knots.” (Sverre Steen, 1951.)



Wilhelm Frimann Koren Christie
 (1780-1848)

of Independence (1776) and Constitution (1787) and the constitutions of the French Republic (1791, 1793 and 1795): sovereignty of the people, separation of powers and civil rights.

Sovereignty of the people

entails that the power is vested in the people, who thereby have the right to rule themselves. The people elect representatives to a national assembly which is entrusted, among other things, with enacting the laws held to be in force in that society.

Separation of powers

involves a division between the legislative, executive and judicial powers, which are vested respectively in the Storting, the King and the courts. The power of the State is divided between several branches of government, which are independent of each other and act as checks and balances on each other. The aim of this principle is to prevent the concentration and abuse of power.

The “innate and inalienable” rights of citizens

are assured. The Constitution affirmed the citizens’ right to freedom of speech, freedom of trade and the rule of law. Freedom of worship was also adopted as a principle for the Constitution, but was not included in any article of the Constitution. Implementation of these rights occurred only gradually.

The Constitution of 4 November 1814

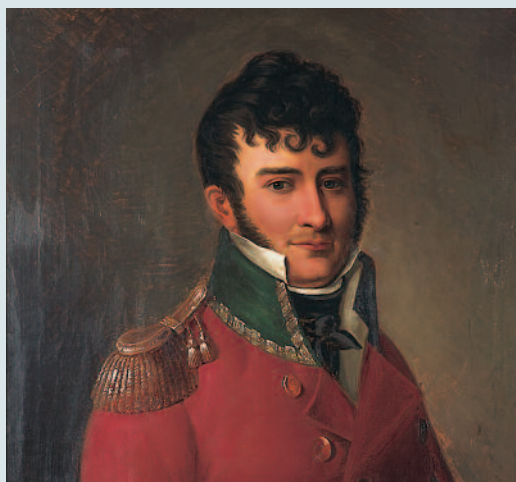
In autumn 1814, Norway yielded to pressure from the Great Powers to accept union with Sweden. The two countries would share a king and thus have joint foreign policy, but were otherwise to have separate governing bodies and full internal independence. In article 1 of the revised Constitution of 4 November 1814 it was established that “The Kingdom of Norway is a free, independent, indivisible and inalienable Realm united with Sweden under one King”. The Union was dissolved in 1905.



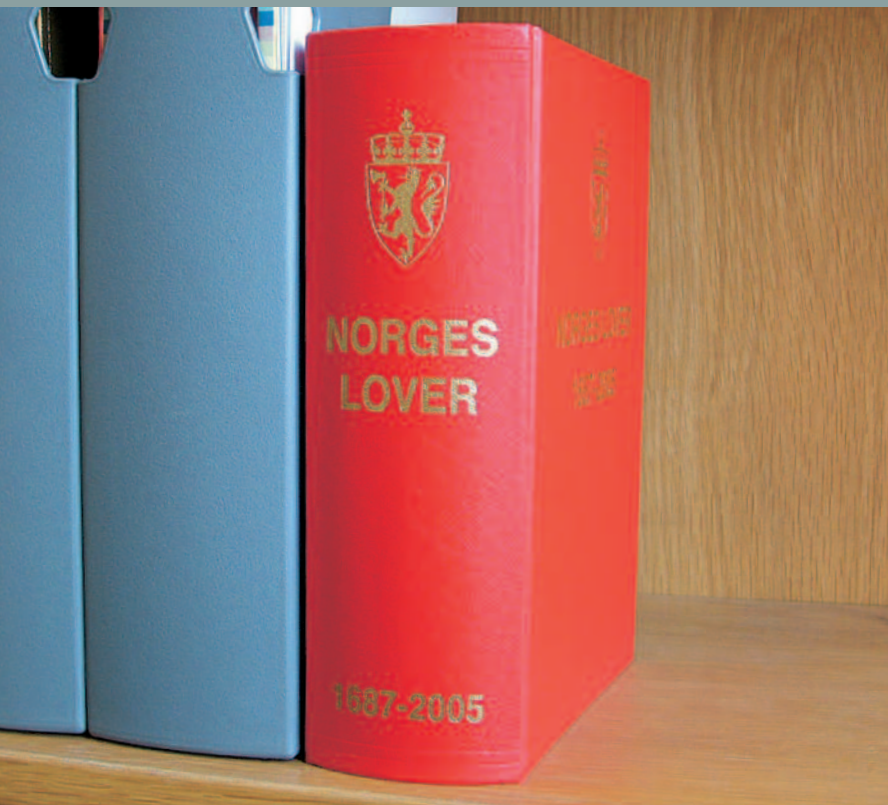
17 May celebrations in Karl Johan

Christian Magnus Falsen (1782-1830)

Johan Gunder Adler (1782-1852)



The Norwegian Constitution



The Constitution divides power into three branches: the Storting, the King (the Government) and the courts

The fundamental rules for how a state shall be governed form the country's constitution. An important element of our constitution is the written Constitution, as are legal rules that are a result of many years of practice (customary law).

The Constitution

In the Constitution of the Kingdom of Norway that was adopted by the Eidsvoll Convention on 17 May 1814 (with later amendments) is stated who shall govern our country and a little on how this is to be done.

The Constitution distributes responsibilities and power between the different branches of government and defines the limits of their power. The Norwegian constitution is founded on democracy. In practice, this functions as representative democracy. The power to deal with individual matters and to make decisions is entrusted to elected representatives.

The Constitution as we know it today is based on a number of principles that were laid down in the original Constitution of 1814: sovereignty of the people, separation of powers and human rights.

The Constitution divides the power into three branches, establishing that

1. legislative, budgetary and supervisory power is vested in the Storting.
2. executive power is vested in the King (in reality the Government), whose responsibility it is to ensure that decisions are put into effect.
3. judicial power is vested in the courts. The highest judicial body is the Supreme Court.

Through the Storting, it is the people who govern the country, issue statutes, grant money, impose taxes and supervise the Government (and thus the government administration).

In order to ensure the democratic rights of the citizens, some very important legal rules have been laid down in the Constitution. These rules state, for example, that:

- no-one may be convicted except according to the law, and
- no-one may be punished except after a court judgment
- there shall be freedom of the press and freedom of speech in Norway
- there shall be freedom of worship
- no-one shall surrender his property without full compensation
- all people in Norway have a right to work and to co-determination at their workplace
- the state has a special responsibility for the Sami people

Many articles of the Constitution are no longer meaningful, and the law lacks provisions concerning important changes that have taken place in Norwegian society and in our political system. Nonetheless, the Constitution is of the greatest importance to us all, and has precedence over all other legal provisions.

The Constitution has been changed many times by amendments to articles and addition of new provisions (75 of the articles have

Johan Sverdrup – “the father of parliamentarism”:
“When it is his turn to speak...he leaps to his feet and opens his mouth and, from that moment, no-one sees or hears anything except what Johan Sverdrup has to say: the words fly from his tongue like lightning, often sharp and biting.” (Newspaper report, 1869.)

Johan Sverdrup
 (1816-1892)



been amended during the course of the years) but, owing to conservative attitudes regarding the Constitution, there have been no major revisions. Article 112 of the Constitution provides that proposed amendments to the Constitution must be submitted during the first three Stortings of an electoral period, and must be considered during the first, second or third Storting of the following period. There will thus always be a general election between submission of a proposed amendment and the decision as to whether or not to adopt it. This allows the electorate to make its opinions known. However, in reality, proposed amendments to the Constitution very rarely play any role in the election campaign.

A two-thirds majority is required to adopt an amendment to the Constitution, and at least two-thirds of the members must be present in

the Chamber to vote on any constitutional matter.

Parliamentarism

The Constitution states that the King himself chooses his Council (the Government). However, owing to the parliamentary system, it is really the people, by means of a general election, who indirectly decide which political parties shall govern. It is not the Storting that appoints the members of a new government, but parliamentarism entails that the Government must have the confidence of the majority in the Storting in order to be able to function. If the Storting expresses a lack of confidence in the Government, the Government must resign and a new government is formed.

Parliamentarism achieved its breakthrough in 1884 after a long and bitter political conflict during the 1870s and the first part

of the 1880s. Since then, the members of the Government have had a right and a duty to meet in the Storting. They attend the debates and are allowed to speak but are not able to vote.

On 20 February 2007 parliamentarism was written into the Constitution. Article 15 now reads: “Any member of the Council of State will be obliged to tender his/her resignation if the Storting votes that that particular member, or the Council of State as a whole no longer has the confidence of the Storting.”

Parliamentarism in practice

During the period from 1884 to 2009 there have been 48 changes of government in Norway. The rules that have been developed throughout these years for the relationship between the Storting and the Government form today the fundamental principle of our political system.

Parliamentarism or the principle of parliamentary rule is the form of government that gives the parliament (Storting) authority over the executive branch (the ministerial Government). The Government is accountable to the Storting and dependent on retaining its confidence. A number of constitutional practices govern relations between the Storting and the Government, violation of which has political consequences which may go so far as to require the resignation of a minister or even an entire Government.



Parliamentarism
“The moment that all power and authority are gathered here in this chamber, to decide on matters of highest and most august import, a great revival will spread through the land [...] The power of government will no longer be wielded without the Storting, it will performe be wielded in accord with the Storting..” (Johan Sverdrup, 1872.)

“The Government does not have the confidence of the Storting”



Under parliamentary rule, the majority in the Storting determines which party or parties form a Government. This does not always mean that a sitting Government will be backed by a majority, but it cannot continue to rule if it is opposed by a majority. It is the latter that is the fundamental characteristic of parliamentarianism. If the Storting votes that the Government does not have the confidence of the Storting, the Government must resign. It is the lack of the Storting's confidence which makes it necessary for the Government to step down. It is thus not a sufficient criterion that a motion criticizes the Government's policy.

There have been a number of no confidence motions in the Storting, altogether 20 since 1980. However, they are rarely adopted. Since 1905, only two governments have been brought down by no confidence motions (in 1928 and in 1963).

A Government may call a vote of confidence and, in doing so, threaten to step down if the Storting does not accept its proposal on a specific issue. When a government calls a vote of confidence, it puts pressure on the Storting and risks the possibility of having to resign in order to win the Storting's support for an issue or prevent a motion from being adopted. A number of Norwegian governments have been brought down by a defeat on a vote of confidence.

In practice, a government also resigns following defeat in a general election, i.e. if the parliamentary majority is changed as a result of the election, thereby creating a parliamentary basis for a new government. The Government requests to resign with reference to the result of the election and actually resigns following the assembly of the newly elected Storting, i.e. when the new Storting is lawfully constituted and the formal opening has taken place. It has also become

common practice for the Government not to submit its resignation until after the Speech from the Throne has been read and the Fiscal Budget has been submitted.

There are other circumstances that can result in a government's resignation. There may be internal political disagreements between coalition partners, a prime minister may wish to step down or a party may want to make changes in its leadership. Changes of government have also been brought about by the illness or death of a prime minister. Owing to the close association between the Government and the Prime Minister, a prime minister's resignation involves the resignation of the whole government.



“It is difficult to perceive this as anything else than a vote of no confidence against central areas of the Government's environmental policy. I wish therefore to make it clear that, if the proposal from the parties in the political centre to refrain from weakening the Pollution Control Act as an instrument for environmental protection is not adopted, the Government will no longer be able to take the responsibility for such a basis, and I will in such case accept the consequences.” (Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik calls for a vote of confidence, 9 March 2000.)

“Honourable members, this day, 11th March 1911, is a historic day for our country because today, for the first time, a woman meets here in the Storting as one of its members – an event which will undoubtedly arouse widespread interest...” The assembly stood as it listened to the President’s speech. (Magnus Halvorsen, President of the Storting, referring to Anna Rogstad, who was the first woman elected to the Storting.)



Anna Georgine Rogstad
(1854-1938)

General elections

“Those entitled to vote are Norwegian citizens, men and women, who, at the latest in the year when the election is held, have completed their 18th year.”

(Article 50 of the Constitution)

Articles 50-64 of the Constitution contain a number of basic provisions concerning the right to vote and general elections. Further provisions are gathered in the Representation of the People Act (2002), which relates to parliamentary and local government elections.

Every fourth year (in September) 169 members are elected to the Storting. A new election cannot be called until the end of an electoral period. In Norway there is universal suffrage. All Norwegian nationals who are over the age of 18 by the end of the election year have the right to vote. All who are entitled to vote and who have resided in Norway for at least ten years are eligible for election as members of the Storting (except, among others, employees of the ministries and Foreign Service).

In order to vote, it is necessary to be entered in the electoral register. Voting is by secret ballot for political parties. The candidates on the lists of the various parties are decided by the parties’ nomination meetings.

Norway has a system of proportional representation. This means that the number of representatives of each party in the Storting is determined by the proportion of votes cast for

the respective party in the election. Norway is divided into 19 constituencies, which are coterminous with the counties. In addition to the 150 ordinary mandates, there are 19 additional

mandates assigned to even out discrepancies between the number of votes received and the number of seats in the Storting.



The Central Hall

The right to vote and the voting age

	Universal suffrage for men.		17 March 1911 Anna Rogstad - first woman Member of the Storting.		Voting age 23 years.		Voting age 20 years.	
1814	1898	1907	1911	1913	1920	1946	1967	1978
Limited suffrage for men - senior government officials, land-owning farmers and merchants. Voting age 25 years.	Women receive a limited right to vote in general elections.		Universal suffrage for women.		Voting age 21 years.		Voting age 18 years.	

The Storting's consideration of legislation



The Storting provides, amends and repeals the statutes by which society is ruled. The provision in the Constitution that it is the people who exercise the legislative power really means that it is the elected representatives of the people, the members of the Storting, who exercise such power.

Ever since 1814, the Storting has dealt with legislation in two chambers – the Odelsting and the Lagting. When a new Storting assembled after an election, one quarter of the Members were elected to serve as members of the Lagting. The remaining three-quarters constituted the Odelsting. All Bills were considered in both chambers; in the case of disagreement, twice. Basically, the Lagting was responsible for checking legislation, but was not empowered to stop it altogether.

On 20 February 2007, the Storting agreed – with one vote against – to formally bring the system of the Odelsting and Lagting to an end. The consequence of this is that a new legislative procedure came into force on 1 October 2009.

The legislative process

Article 76 of the Constitution governs the way in which laws are considered in the Storting: *“Every Bill shall be proposed in the Storting, either by one of its own Members, or by the Government through a Member of the Council of State.”*

Preparation

A Bill introduced by the Government in the form of a Proposition to the Storting is the product of thorough preparatory work. In the case of a major item of legislation or an extensive revision of an existing law, the Government generally appoints an expert committee or commission. There are also more or less permanent law committees, such as the Penal Code Council and the Civil Code Commission.

Such an expert committee usually consists of lawyers, civil servants and spokespeople for the affected parties. The committee submits a report – a draft Bill – to the ministry in charge of the Bill. Such reports are usually published in the series Official Norwegian Reports (NOU).

Proposition to the Storting (Bill)

The Ministry usually sends the Bill out for comment. In this way, other affected government bodies, organizations, institutions and associations are given the opportunity to state their opinions. When comments from the consultation round have been received, the Ministry draws up a draft Proposition to the Storting (a Bill) with a draft enactment of a Bill. The Proposition is presented to the King in Council. If it is approved there, the Proposition is sent to the Storting as a whole. Under the new system, a Bill may not contain both a draft enactment of a Bill and a draft recommendation or proposal for another kind of resolution, such as an appropriations resolution.

The further process

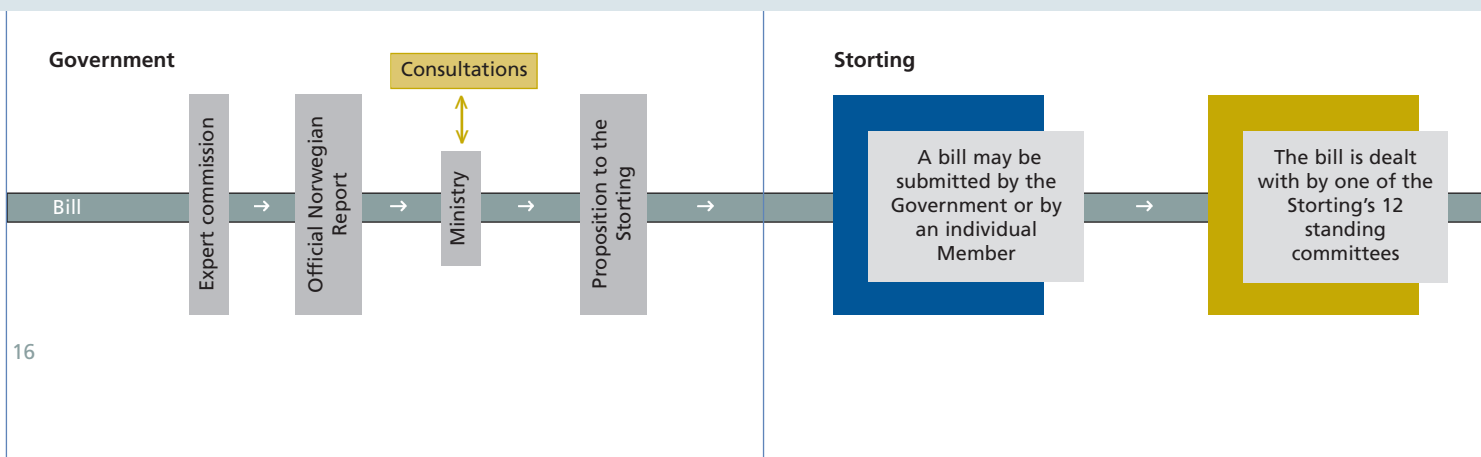
The committee stage

After the Bill has been introduced, it is sent to one of the Storting's standing committees. The committee considers the Bill in detail and submits its recommendation with a proposed decision to the Storting. If the Proposition contains both a Bill and another proposal, the committee must submit two recommendations – one for the enactment of the Bill and one for the resolution of the Storting.

Consideration in plenary session

The first time the Bill is dealt with in the Chamber is called the *first reading*. The first reading corresponds to how the Bill was previously dealt with in the Odelsting, but it takes place in plenary session. The recommendation from the committee is debated, amendments are proposed and voted on, and eventually a decision is made. The decision of the first reading is not final. However, a Bill that is dismissed is dropped if it is rejected after the first reading.

If the Bill passes the first reading, there must then be an interval of at least three days before the Storting meets again in plenary session to debate the Bill and vote for a second time – what we can call the *second reading*. This time it is the decision from the first reading that is up for debate. If the Bill is adopted by the Storting a second time, it has reached the end of the legislative process in the Storting. It is then sent to the King in Council to receive the Royal Assent.





Leftmost: Meeting of the Odelsting

Left: Meeting of the Lagting

"The people exercise the Legislative Power through the Storting." (Article 49 of the Constitution.)

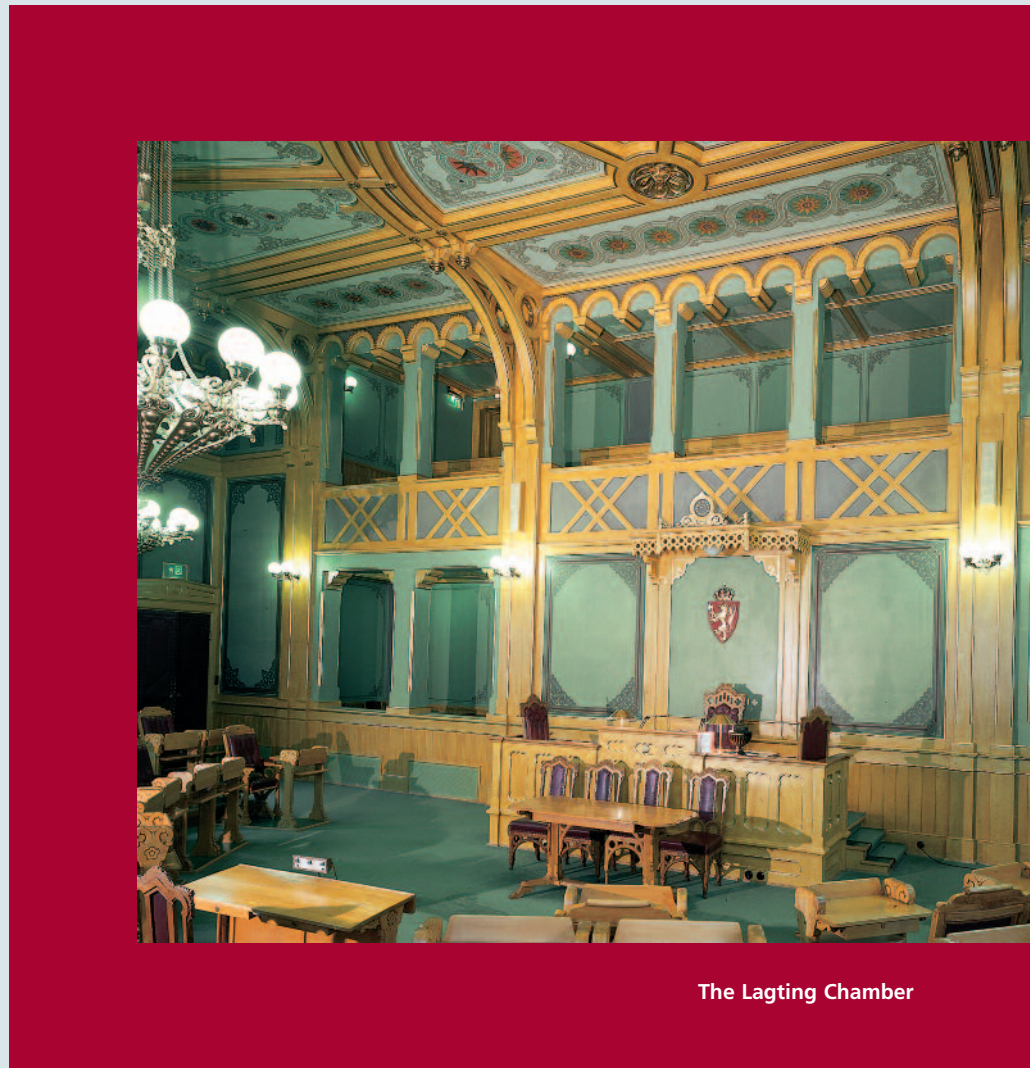
As with the old system, a Bill will usually be considered twice before being finally adopted. If, however, during the second reading, the Storting comes to a different conclusion to the first reading, *amendments* to the draft enactment of the Bill are adopted. In this case, the Storting will meet in plenary session for a *third reading*. The Storting can now adopt the amendments made during the second reading, and the Bill is then passed complete with these amendments. The Storting may also decide to dismiss the matter. The decision made at the end of the third reading requires a simple majority, unlike previously, where a two-thirds majority was necessary to pass a Bill.

In reality, most matters concerning legislation are decided when the committee has submitted its recommendation even though the final work still remains.

When an Act has received the Royal Assent, it is published in the Norwegian Law Gazette.

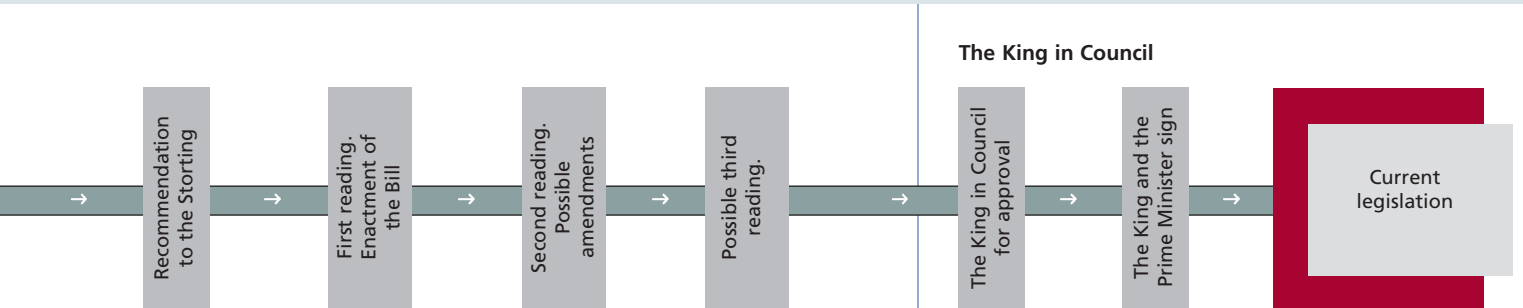
When the King has signed the Act and the Prime Minister has countersigned, it becomes Norwegian law from the date stated in the Act or decided by the Government.

The Constitution states that the legislative power is exercised through the Storting. In practice, however, the Storting delegates much of its power to the Government and government administration. This is done by adopting framework Acts or enabling Acts that give the Government or government

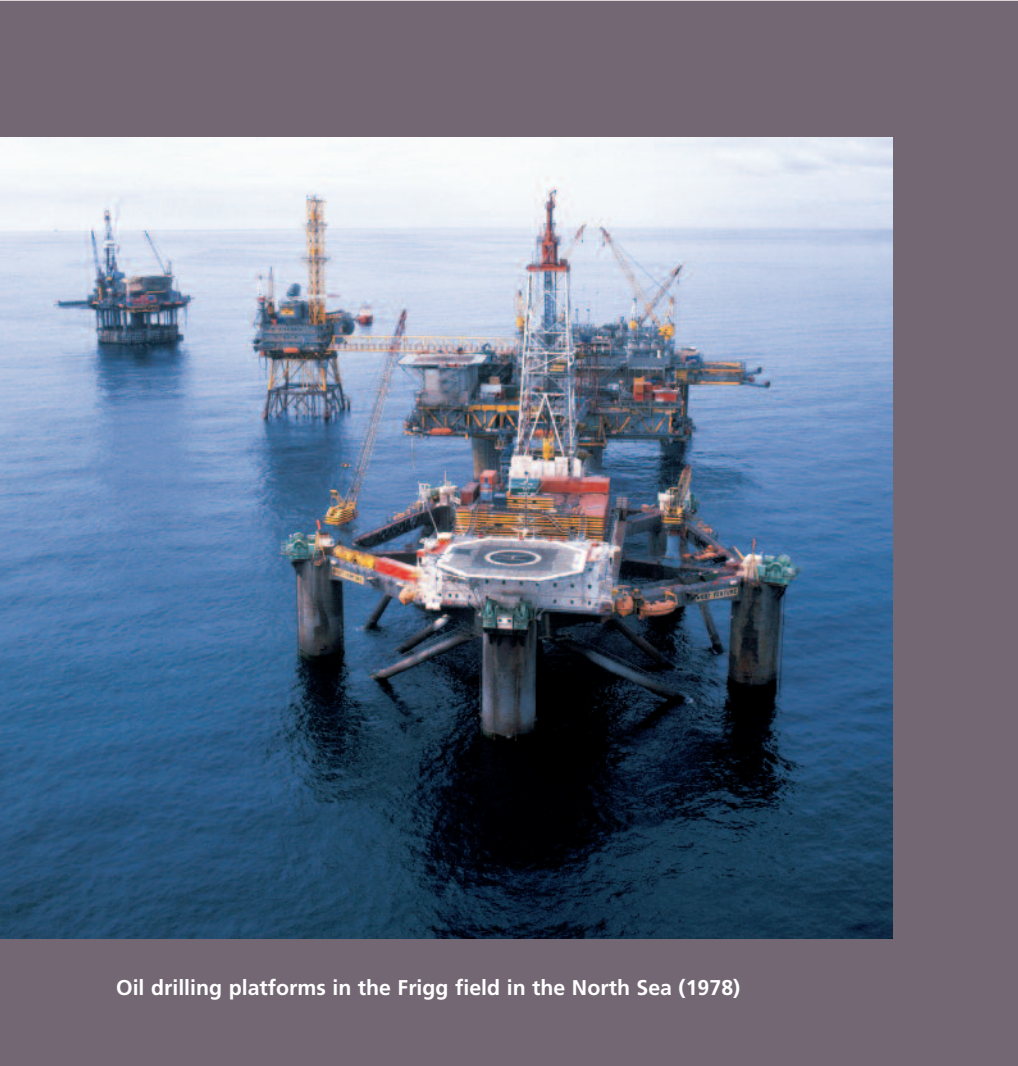


The Lagting Chamber

administration the authority to issue further provisions, rules and regulations. It is calculated that there are approximately three times as many regulations as Acts.



The budget work of the Storting



Oil drilling platforms in the Frigg field in the North Sea (1978)

According to the Constitution, it is the Storting that decides over the finances of the state, both income and expenditure. Since the National Insurance Act entered into force in 1967, the budget has also included the income and expenditure that falls within the scope of the social security schemes. It is the Storting that allocates money, i.e. makes money available to the executive power, the Government. Not only does the Storting permit that money be used for specific purposes; it also has the right to order this.

Proposition to the Storting

When the Storting assembles in the autumn, the Fiscal Budget is always the first major item of business to be dealt with, and the budget process takes up most of the autumn session. The Fiscal Budget is perhaps the most important policy instrument the Storting and the Government have and, by means of the budget, the framework is established for state activities during the coming years. The Government's budget proposals are presented in a Proposition to the Storting

The Fiscal Budget must be submitted within six days of the opening of the Storting. The Minister of Finance then makes the Budget Statement, which gives an account of the challenges facing the country and the priorities and measures the Government will take

The beginning of the parliamentary year

The first weekday in October

<p>Assembles (annually).</p> <p>The Storting assembles on the first weekday in October.</p>	<p>Only in election years.</p> <p>The Storting checks the election result (the authorities given to the members by the election boards in their counties).</p> <p>This work takes approximately one week.</p>	<p>Constitution of the Storting (annual).</p> <p>The Storting assembles and constitutes itself. Election of presidents and secretaries.</p>	<p>State Opening (annual).</p> <p>Performed by the King (usually the day after the constitution of the Storting unless this is a Sunday). Speech from the Throne. Report on the State of the Realm</p>	<p>Debate on the Speech from the Throne (annual).</p>	<p>Within six days after the formal opening of the Storting (annually).</p> <p>Budget Statement. The Fiscal Budget.</p>
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“It devolves upon the Storting: a) [...] to impose taxes, dues, customs and other public charges... b) to raise loans in the name of the Realm; c) to supervise the monetary affairs of the Realm; d) to appropriate the moneys necessary to meet government expenditure. [...]” Article 75 of the Constitution.

to meet these challenges. The Budget Statement forms part of the basis of the subsequent Budget Debate. At the same time, a report is submitted to the Storting concerning the National Budget (Report No. 1 to the Storting).

Before the budget is considered by the Storting, it undergoes preparatory stages involving all government institutions and branches of the central government administration. After conclusion of discussions between the ministries and the Government, the Ministry of Finance draws up a complete Fiscal Budget proposal, which includes the National Insurance scheme. The budget is formally approved by the King in Council, and is submitted to the Storting as a Proposition.

Work on the Fiscal Budget

On the basis of the Government’s Fiscal Budget proposal, the party groups normally prepare their own alternative budgets, which form the basis of their views on the distribution between the various spending programmes. Before the commencement of negotiations in the Standing Committee on Finance, all of the parties inform the Committee of their main standpoints.

In the Storting, it is the Presidium that distributes the various budget chapters between the Standing Committees. The

recommendation concerning this distribution is considered and adopted by the plenary Storting. After the committee chair has been given the opportunity to state his or hers views, the Presidium also sets the time limits for submission of budget recommendations by the committees.

The budget proceedings of the Storting are coordinated by the Standing Committee on Finance, which by 20 November at the latest submits a recommendation concerning the National Budget and Fiscal Budgets including National Insurance, with a proposed resolution on budget ceilings. The Recommendation also includes the different parties’ proposed resolutions on budget ceilings, and is referred to as the Budget Recommendation. The committee submits at the same time a recommendation concerning taxes, revenue items and block grants to municipalities and counties.

The Storting must deal with these recommendations within one week. This is then followed by the annual budget debate. During this debate, the parties are given the opportunity to discuss the Government’s economic policy and the volume of government income and expenditure. From a political point of view, this is one of the Storting’s most important debates.

During the debate, the most important arguments for and against the Government’s general economic policy are presented and indications are given of the support that can be anticipated by the Government. The debate is concluded by a vote on the proposals submitted in the budget recommendations. The amounts for all the separate expenditure areas are fixed collectively in a single resolution. The Storting’s resolution on budget ceilings is binding for the subsequent budget proceedings.

In the following period, the standing committees submit recommendations concerning appropriations within the spending



Schedule for the budget work of the Storting

The budget from the Government to the Storting

Six days after the opening of the Storting at the latest.	20 November at the latest.	15 December at the latest.	15 May of the budget year at the latest.	Second Friday in June at the latest.
The Fiscal Budget is submitted to the Storting. The Presidium makes its recommendations regarding distribution of budget chapters between the various Standing Committees and expenditure areas.	The recommendation of the Standing Committee on Finance concerning the National Budget and the Fiscal Budget with a proposed resolution on budget ceilings and the recommendation concerning taxes and block grants to municipalities and county authorities.	The budget recommendations of the Standing Committees.	The Royal Aggregate Budget Proposition concerning amendments to the Fiscal Budget and the Report to the Storting concerning the Revised National Budget.	The recommendations of the Standing Committee on Finance concerning these amendments. Budget to be adopted by the end of the spring session.



programmes allocated to them, which shall include all chapters and items within each separate expenditure area. The standing committees may only make reallocations within the ceilings decided. This means that increases in expenditure must be matched by decreases in expenditure or by increases in income.

The standing committees' budget recommendations must be considered by the Storting by 15 December at the latest, culminating in the Storting's final budget resolution. The amounts for all the separate items within an expenditure area are fixed collectively in a single resolution.

In order to ensure that the whole budget will be finished on time, strict time limits are observed. The period during the budget proceedings is often extremely hectic. The Government's proposal and the Storting's resolution normally differ financially by less than one per cent. The signals given by the Storting by means of its comments and priorities are of political importance, since they may influence subsequent budgets.

The Storting makes many of its appropriations in the form of block grants, so it is the Government that makes the final decisions about how the funds are to be applied. When adopted, the Fiscal Budget is published on the Internet (www.stortinget.no).

The Revised National Budget

Budget amendments made during the course of the year may be submitted by the Government as propositions. A Royal Aggregate Budget Proposition concerning amendments to all the separate budgets of the individual ministries must be submitted by 15 May during the fiscal year concerned, in connection with the submission of the Report to the Storting concerning the Revised National Budget. The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs submits recommendations concerning such amendments by the second Friday in June at the latest. These are considered by the Storting, which adopts the revised budget by the end of the spring session.



The supervisory authority of the Storting

The third main function of the Storting is to supervise the Government and the public administration. The Storting is responsible for ensuring that the Government implements the decisions of the Storting and for controlling that the various central government agencies adhere to the guidelines drawn up by the Storting.

The Constitution assigns a number of supervisory functions to the Storting, including:

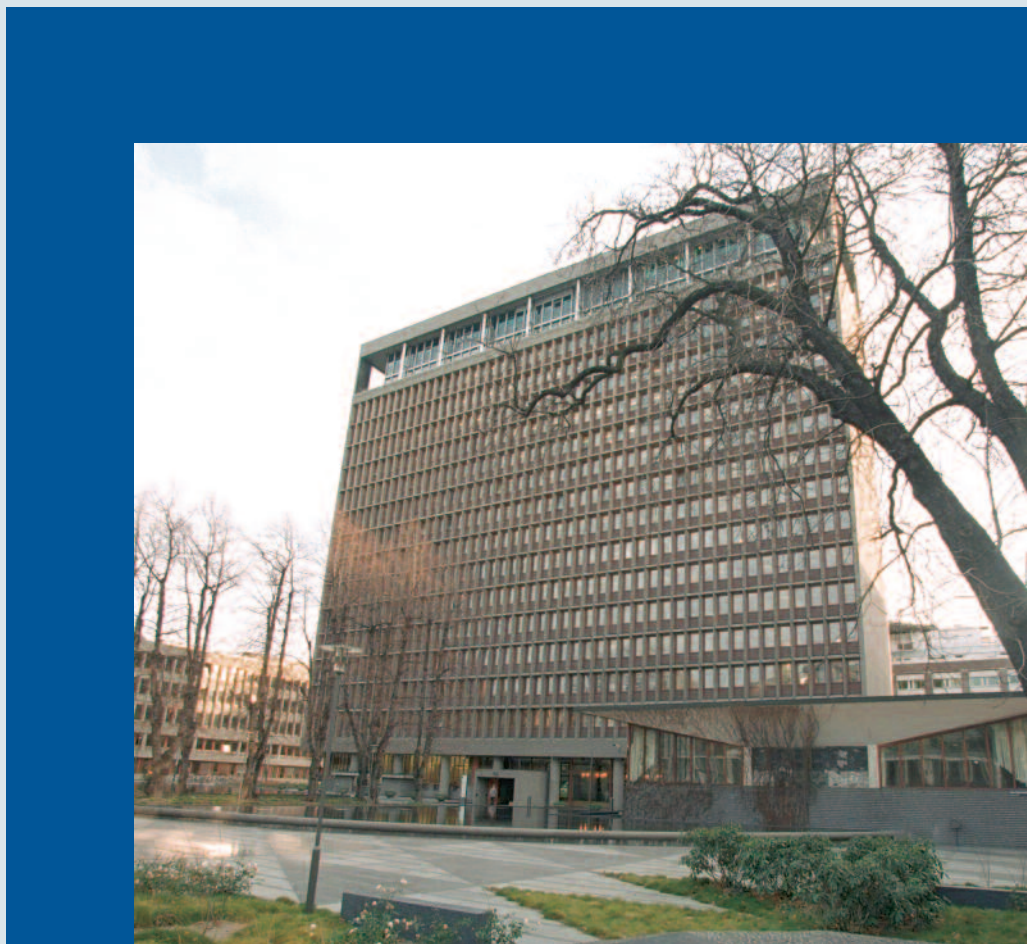
- examining the Records of the Council of State (the decisions taken in Council)
- reviewing treaties concluded with foreign powers
- auditing the State Accounts

However, perhaps the most important duty is the political accountability of the Government to the Storting. By means of the parliamentary system, the Storting has control over the Government and its policy. However, the extent of the Storting's power in relation to the Government is largely dependent on the parliamentary situation. Regardless of this, the Government is accountable to the Storting. The Storting's majority decides in reality who will govern, and it can also remove the Government by means of a vote of no confidence.

The breakthrough for parliamentarianism in 1884 and subsequent developments have given the Storting a quite different and much broader basis for controlling the various aspects of the Government's policy. The substantial control which the Storting exercises over the public administration is often based on information communicated through the mass media.

Debates

Parliamentary debates provide the Storting with opportunities to scrutinize and evaluate Government policies. The debates are generally open to the public. The subject of debates is often business introduced by the Government. Each year, the debate on the Speech from the Throne inaugurates the new session of the Storting. In many ways, this debate has evolved into an examination and discussion of the



The H Block of the Government Administration Complex with the Office of the Prime Minister on the top floor

Government's political programme, essentially the same function as the Budget Debate in respect of the Government's economic policy. Numerous reports on various aspects of Government policy are presented and debated throughout the year.

Questions and interpellations

Questions and interpellations addressed to the members of the Government provide an opportunity for individual Storting members to obtain information on specific matters and to ascertain the views of the ministers on specific political issues. There are several procedures for asking questions.

Question Time is held nearly every week while the Storting is in session. During the first part of Question Time, government ministers reply directly to spoken questions from members in what is known as oral Question Time. These questions are not submitted in advance, though the members are informed ahead of time which ministers will be attending. The members are thus able to adapt their questions to the ministers who will be attending. The Prime Minister attends once a month. The President decides who is to speak and in what order.

“The committee may also make any further inquiries within the administration deemed necessary for the Storting’s scrutiny of the public administration. [...] Before the committee itself makes such inquiries, the minister concerned shall be notified and requested to procure the information required.”
(Section 12 of the Storting’s Rules of Procedure.)

This period is followed by ordinary Question Time, when ministers reply to 10–20 written questions submitted by Members by the previous Thursday. The questions are short and often concern specific matters. During Question Time, the members are free to ask what they wish, and questions range from small individual matters to major matters of principle. Questions often concern matters originating in local politics and/or that have been focused on by the mass media. The questioner usually wants to know the minister’s views on the matter and/or whether the Ministry intends to do anything about it.

A Member may also submit questions for written reply, which must be answered by the minister within six working days.

Interpellations are a more formal way of submitting questions. They generally deal with matters of greater scope and political importance, and often lead to debates. The Prime

Minister or the minister concerned notifies the President in writing when he or she intends to answer the interpellation. The answer must come without undue delay, and no later than one month after the interpellation is submitted. When the matter comes up in the Storting, the interpellator (the Member who submitted the interpellation) is called upon to speak for a maximum of ten minutes to explain the substance of the interpellation. The minister is allowed the same length of time to reply. Other ministers, including the Prime Minister, may also answer, but they are limited to ten minutes each. If a debate ensues, the interpellator first, and then the minister, are each entitled to speak once, for no more than three minutes. Other members may then take the floor for no more than five minutes each. A Member may speak only once. The interpellator and the minister involved may each make a closing speech of up to three minutes. Proposals may not be submitted in connection with consideration of an interpellation. Consideration of the

interpellation must not last longer than one hour and 30 minutes.

Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs

The Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs is one of the Storting’s 12 permanent committees. It reviews and makes recommendations to the Storting on such matters as the Records of the Council of State.

It also reviews the reports of the Office of the Auditor General and the Government’s annual report on follow-up of decisions of the Storting that contain petitions to the Government, and on consideration of Private Member’s Motions submitted by the Storting to the Government for investigation and comment. The Committee also deals with constitutional matters, appropriations for the Storting, election legislation and reports from the Parliamentary Ombudsman and from the Storting’s Committee for the Monitoring of Intelligence, Surveillance and Security Services.

This Committee is further empowered to conduct whatever investigations into the public administration it may find necessary for the exercise of the Storting’s control over the public administration. This step may only be taken after a particular minister has been notified and requested to submit the required information. The backing of one third of the Committee’s members is sufficient for such a decision to be made (rights of the minority).



The Storting’s supervisory authority

Debates

Parliamentary debates provide the Storting with opportunities to scrutinize and evaluate Government policies. The debates are generally open to the public.

Questions and interpellations

Questions and interpellations addressed to the members of the Government provide an opportunity for individual Storting Members to obtain information on specific matters and to ascertain the views of the ministers on specific political issues.

Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs

– reviews and makes recommendations to the Storting on such matters as the Records of the Council of State. The Committee has the right of initiative, which means that it is empowered to take up whatever matters it wishes to investigate.



The Office of the Auditor General

The purpose of the Office of the Auditor General (Riksrevisjonen) is, by means of audits and controls, to ensure that the State assets are utilized and managed according to sound financial principles and in keeping with the decisions and intentions of the Storting. The responsibilities of the Office of the Auditor General are laid down in the Constitution, the Act relating to the Auditing of Governmental Accounts and instructions laid down by the Storting.

The Office of the Auditor General is independent of the Government and other administrative bodies and is the Storting's most important supervisory body. The Office of the Auditor General currently has around 500 employees organized in seven departments. The five national auditors appointed by the Storting jointly head the Office of the Auditor General.

Each year the Office of the Auditor General audits the central government accounts and the accounts relating to the administration of Svalbard. These accounts show how the Government and ministries have used the state funds.

The Parliamentary Ombudsman

The Parliamentary Ombudsman for Public Administration (Sivilombudsmannen) is appointed by the Storting for a term of four years from 1 January of the year following a general election. This official may not be a Member of the Storting, and must be a lawyer (and hold the qualifications required of a Supreme Court Judge). The duty of the

Ombudsman is to ensure that individuals do not suffer injustice at the hands of the public administration. Although such a control is conducted by the courts in the cases brought before them, there is a clear need for an ombudsman. A court action is costly and time-consuming. By taking a complaint to the Ombudsman, an aggrieved person may obtain a decision through a much easier process. The Ombudsman examines the case and makes a statement. If he finds that a government action or decision is in violation of the law or is manifestly unreasonable, the agency in question will normally reconsider the matter and follow the recommendation of the Ombudsman.

The Storting has also appointed ombudsmen for the armed forces and for persons performing non-military service in lieu of national service, to help to ensure the universal rights of these groups.

Review of treaties and cooperation agreements

Each year, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs communicates to the Storting all the treaties and agreements concluded with foreign powers. The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence examines these and makes a recommendation to the Storting. A number of these treaties will already have been acted upon by the Storting, since Article 26 of the Constitution provides that the Storting must give its consent to all treaties "on matters of special importance" before they are held to be binding. This gives the Storting considerable influence on the conduct of foreign affairs and the ratification of treaties.

Public hearings

In certain cases, a standing committee may find it appropriate to subject a matter to a public scrutiny hearing. Special considerations apply in scrutiny matters where there is a suspicion of reproachable conditions or negligence in government or administration. The purpose is often to establish the responsibilities of ministers.

The Committee for the Monitoring of Intelligence, Surveillance and Security Services is responsible for continuous supervision of the secret services.

The Storting may appoint parliamentary inquiry commissions.

Advisory bodies

The European Consultative Committee is a purely advisory body, the function of which is to advise the Government on Norway's responsibilities in relation to the various EU directives considered by the EEA Joint Committee, which is a joint body for EU and EFTA countries.



The Office of the Auditor General

– by means of audits and controls, ensures that the State assets are utilized and managed according to sound financial principles and in keeping with the decisions and intentions of the Storting.

The Parliamentary Ombudsman

– ensures that individuals do not suffer injustice at the hands of the public administration.

The Committee for the Monitoring of Intelligence, Surveillance and Security Services

– is responsible for continuous supervision of the secret services.

Parliamentary inquiry commissions

– may be appointed by the Storting.

The Storting at work

Anyone who wishes may obtain information about the work of the Storting. The meetings of the Storting are open to the public and the media. Debates can be followed directly from the Public Gallery on the radio or via the Internet (www.stortinget.no).

A number of publications are also issued in the course of proceedings. These include the Government's reports and propositions (www.regjeringen.no) and the Storting's recommendations, decisions and records of proceedings (www.stortinget.no).

The Constitution provides rules concerning the composition, duties and activities of the Storting, but does not specify all the details of working procedures. The Storting's Rules of Procedure contains rules concerning the organization and working procedures of the Storting.

The Storting assembles and constitutes itself

"The Storting shall as a rule assemble on the first weekday in October every year."
(Article 68 of the Constitution.)

The members assemble on the first weekday in October to begin a new session of the Storting. When a newly elected Storting first assembles, the highest ranked member from each county presents credentials from the election committee in his or her county stating that the members elected by that county have a mandate to meet in the Storting. All credentials are examined by the Credentials Committee. If errors have occurred, new elections may be ordered.

When the recommendation from the Credentials Committee has been acted upon, the Storting proceeds to elect its President and five Vice Presidents. Two Secretaries are also elected.

When it has been reported to the Storting that their Presidents and Secretaries have

been elected, the President declares the Storting lawfully constituted and notifies the King.

The State Opening of the Storting

The King normally performs the State Opening of the Storting on the first weekday after the Storting has constituted itself. The Speech from the Throne, which is delivered by the King, is a presentation of the Government's programme for the coming year. After this, a member of the Government reads the Report on the State of the Realm. Some days later, the Speech from the Throne is debated by the Storting.

The Presidium

Presidents are elected in the same way each time the Storting assembles during an electoral term. The six elected Presidents constitute the Storting's Presidium, which administers the business of the Storting. The President may also exercise disciplinary power in order to ensure that the Rules of Procedure are complied with.

The President of the Storting chairs the meetings of the Presidium. When purely political issues arise upon which there are divergent opinions, the President consults the parties' parliamentary leaders. The Presidium also has responsibility for representation, for example during visits by parliamentary delegations from abroad, and has a number of administrative responsibilities, such as budgetary procedures, approval of committee trips abroad, etc.

Preparatory work

The work of the Storting does not consist exclusively of the activities that take place in the Chamber where they can be observed by everyone. Much of the work of the members takes place in committees, where it is less visible to the general public. In fact, it is in the committees that the real decisions on most matters of business are made.

The standing committees of the Storting

Most of the business laid before the Storting and the Odelsting is first prepared by a committee. Each Member of the Storting serves on one of the 12 permanent committees.

It is the job of the committees to prepare the matters that will be deliberated by the Storting, Lagting and Odelsting. The composition of the standing committees is decided by an Election Committee of 37 members. The parties are proportionally represented as far as possible on this committee, and geographical distribution is also taken into account. However, the preparatory work is done in the party groups, which distribute their members between the various committees, and by contact between the party groups. After that, the matter is dealt with by the Election Committee, which usually approves the proposals made by the party groups.

The provisions concerning the composition and duties of the committees are laid down in the Storting's Rules of Procedure. Since all members must sit on one of the standing committees, it is not always possible to

Committee room



“The parliamentary system is somewhat dominated by customs and traditions. The routines are important and, although they are sometimes slow, there is always someone who watches over things and makes sure they turn out well. And there is “always a reason for such formal ways of doing things.”
(Guttorm Hansen: – Der er det godt å sitte..., 1984.)

achieve the same party political distribution in all of the committees as is found in the Storting as a whole.

When the committees have been appointed, each committee elects a Chair, a First Vice Chair and a Second Vice Chair. The committees vary in size, but normally have from 8 to 18 members.

Most of the matters deliberated by the Storting are first prepared by one of the standing committees. Matters are usually prepared by the committee with a name closely resembling the name of the Ministry responsible for the matter. For example, the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications deals with matters within the sphere of action of the Ministry of Transport and Communications.

For each item of business sent to a committee, the committee elects a spokesperson, who then assumes responsibility for presenting the matter to the committee, obtaining information and seeing the matter through the procedure in committee until the committee has adopted its final recommendation. The spokesperson also formulates the recommendation in writing. This

The Storting Chamber – voting buttons



State Opening of the Storting

The Standing Committees

- The Standing Committee on Labour and Social Affairs
- The Standing Committee on Energy and the Environment
- The Standing Committee on Family and Cultural Affairs
- The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs
- The Standing Committee on Health and Care Services
- The Standing Committee on Justice
- The Standing Committee on Education, Research and Church Affairs
- The Standing Committee on Local Government and Public Administration
- The Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs
- The Standing Committee on Business and Industry
- The Standing Committee on Transport and Communications
- The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence

“The great jigsaw puzzle of the committees is laid during the first weeks after a newly elected Storting assembles. [...] The members themselves wander around biting their nails at the thought of what is in store for them. Finally, everything falls into place – geographical representation, gender and party distribution – preferably so that bitterly disappointed members are few and far between. [...] For some of the committees are more sought-after than others. In principle, all are equal, but some are more equal than others. However, the status and importance of a committee varies over time.” (Guttorm Hansen.)

recommendation contains a summary of the matter and the comments of the committee with a proposed decision. The recommendation is submitted to the Storting, which is responsible for the final decision.

Many matters are concluded with a unanimous decision by the committee. Disagreement among the Members may give rise to exhaustive discussions, and committees often split into two or more factions over specific issues. Each faction may elect its own spokesperson and, if the committee is unable to reach agreement, the views of the minorities are included in the recommendation as dissenting views (or remarks). In particularly difficult matters, often of a political nature, it is usual that the factions discuss the matter in meetings with the party groups or their steering committees. The political standpoints that are clarified in these meetings later form the basis of the negotiations that take place in the committee. The meetings are held in camera (behind closed doors).

In the course of proceedings, a committee may call in representatives from ministries, organizations, or private individuals to hearings for the purpose of obtaining information. Organizations and individuals may

also request to appear before a committee to present their views. These hearings must be held in public unless otherwise decided.

Consideration of the various matters by the committee involves a considerable amount of work. The spokesperson plays a particularly important role in the final drafting of the recommendation. The recommendation is signed by the chair and the spokesperson before being submitted to the Storting. Each committee has a permanent secretary (the Standing Committee on Finance and the Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs have two), employed by the Storting to assist Members in performing the work of the committee. The recommendation of a committee generally determines the outcome of the measure in the Storting, as Members normally follow the vote of their party in the committee. A measure which has received a majority vote in a committee will normally receive a majority vote in the Storting as well, though there is less assurance of the outcome if the proportional representation of the parties in the committee differs from that of the Storting.

Normally, the committees may only consider matters received from the Storting. The Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs is an exception in this respect, since it is free to “make any further inquiries within the administration deemed necessary for the Storting’s scrutiny of the public administration”.

The Enlarged Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence

The Election Committee also appoints an Enlarged Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. This consists of the ordinary members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, the President of the Storting and the chairs of the party groups (if they are not already members of one of the committees). The Election Committee may, at the request of a group, appoint further members if it finds that considerations regarding the proportional representation of the groups so indicate. The duty of the Committee is to discuss important foreign policy, trade policy and national security policy issues. These discussions take place before major decisions are taken by the Government. The business of this Committee is kept secret unless otherwise expressly decided.



“Political power lies in the party groups [...] The party groups are in practice what everything revolves around [...] Throughout the hundred years of the parliamentary system in Norway, the party groups have played an important role.” (Guttorm Hansen.)



Party groups and group secretariats

When the newly elected members arrive at the Storting, they organize themselves in party groups. The members elected from the same political party constitute a party group. At group meetings the parties define their political positions and formulate their views on issues currently being dealt with in the Storting.

Each group elects a steering committee and a chair, who is also called the parliamentary party leader. The chair makes certain political decisions, coordinates group activities, suggests the distribution of Members among the committees, assigns speaking time and so forth.

Most party groups hold meetings on Wednesday afternoons, when important matters are discussed and the Members inform on the matters currently being dealt with by the standing committees to which they belong. The party groups discuss and clarify their positions on all the important matters to be considered by the Storting so that the Members can stand as united as possible there. If there is disagreement within the party group concerning any matter, this is clarified in advance within the group. A minority usually bows to the

view of the majority, and votes in support of it when the matter comes up in the Storting. In the case of matters of importance to the individual Members' constituencies (e.g. localization matters), local considerations may take precedence over the view of the party majority. The same may apply in "matters of conscience". It is in the party groups that strategies are discussed and laid and that the political initiatives of the individual Members are assessed and approved. Group meetings are not open to the public.

Each party group has its own secretariat at the Storting that assists the Members with work of a political or more practical nature.

Sittings of the Storting

The schedule of sittings for the coming week is announced at the end of each week. The Presidium decides when the Storting is to meet, and sets the agenda for each sitting. The sitting and the agendas must be announced at least 24 hours before they are due to start.

Five minutes before the start of a sitting, bells ring throughout the Storting Building, calling the Members to the sitting. Even if the Members are occupied with other

work, they are called into the chamber. The President ascertains that a lawful quorum (50 per cent) is present before calling the sitting to order.

When a Member begins to speak, he or she addresses the President, and therefore begins with the words "Honourable President", "Mr. President", "President" or the like. The President chairs the sitting and maintains order in the chamber during the sitting.

The Storting's Rules of Procedure provide rules for the length of speeches, and the President sees to it that speakers do not exceed their time limits. When a lengthy debate is anticipated (e.g. the debate on the Speech from the Throne), the President agrees with the parliamentary leaders on the length of the debate, distribution of speaking time and the speaking order in order to arrive at a fair distribution of speaking time between the party groups. The speaking time allotted to each party is determined according to the number of Members it has, although the smallest parties are always allowed more time per Member than the largest.



Speakers normally begin by addressing the President, “Honourable President!” or “Mr. President!” or “President!” or “Esteemed President!” or the like.

Sittings are usually held on weekdays between 10.00 and 16.00 hrs. If required owing to the amount of work, the Presidium may also decide to hold evening sittings between 18.00 and 22.00 hrs. Sittings may continue beyond this hour with the consent of the Storting.

The debates also enable the Storting to scrutinize or criticize the Government’s policies. Most of the matters considered by the Storting are submitted by the Government. However, it is also possible for members of the Storting to present Private Member’s Bills.

It is possible by means of questions and interpellations to members of the government to obtain information about specific matters and/or ascertain the Government’s views on current political issues.

When all the speakers enrolled have spoken, the President declares the debate closed. The matter is put to the vote at the end of the day’s sitting unless the Storting decides otherwise. All matters except proposed amendments to the Constitution can be voted on when at least half of the members are present in the chamber. In order to debate proposed amendments to the

Constitution, at least two-thirds of the members must be present. A special call signal is used to call members into the chamber for voting.

Parliamentary proceedings end with voting, often after lengthy discussions by committees and party groups and extensive debate. The result of the voting may be a unanimous support or rejection of the proposal, but is more likely to show a majority for or against. Thus the result complies with the democratic principle that matters shall be decided by the majority after the minority has been given the opportunity to express its views.

In the Storting Chamber, the electronic voting system is usually used. Members voting for a motion press a green button marked “for” and remain seated, while those voting against press a red button marked “against” and stand up. When voting is complete, the results are shown on results boards and are simultaneously listed on a printout showing how each member has voted.

Roll call voting is used for particularly important or controversial matters, often when voting over proposed amendments to

the Constitution and always when voting over a motion of no confidence or a call for a vote of confidence.

Secret ballots are only used in connection with elections.

Votes are normally decided by a simple majority, i.e. more than half of the votes cast. Amendments to the Constitution require a two-thirds majority. Article 93 of the Constitution requires a three-quarters majority for legislation which would transfer authority to international organizations. The EEA Agreement was ratified on the basis of this clause (130 to 35 by a roll call vote).

“The empty Chamber”

The working hours of a Member of the Storting are not regulated by contract, nor do the provisions of worker protection legislation apply.

A day in the life of a Member of the Storting is determined largely by the schedule of meetings in the parties and committees, and by the sittings in the Storting. These meetings normally call for a certain amount of preparatory work on the part of the Member: documents to study, information to be obtained, memo-





“I love the Storting, public life, opponents and fellow supporters, the building where we sit, the benches, the facade. If I were not defeated and miserable, I would love you too – because you have won a place in the Storting. You and not I. Oh, there are things you cannot comprehend – how it feels to be thrust out. If the events have no meaning, there is not a shred of justice!... But think of the Storting itself, think of the long, light months when we sit in the Storting. Lavinia, Lavinia – it is so good to sit there.” (Nils Kjær: Det lykkelige valg, 1913.)

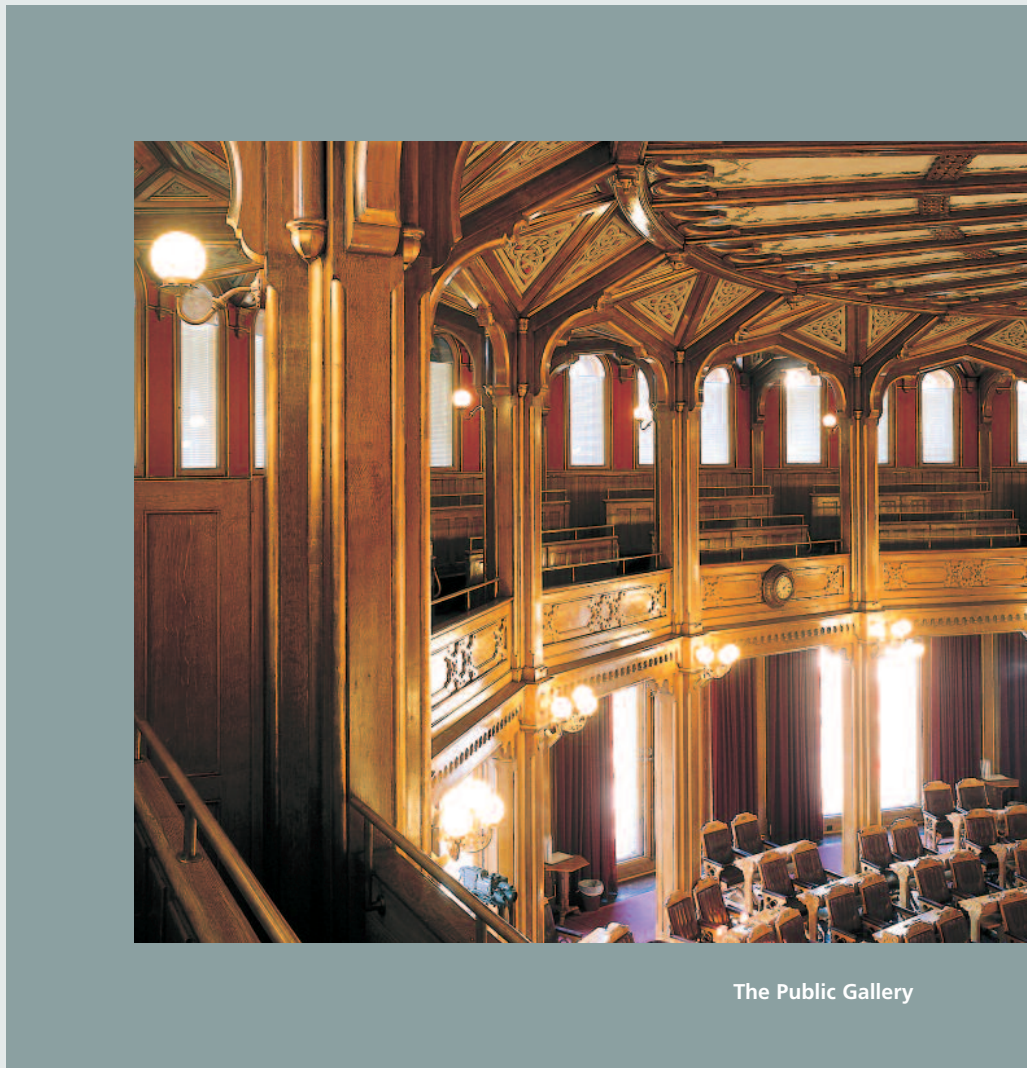
“The empty Chamber”

randa and other documents to be prepared and speeches to be composed on current items of business in the Storting.

Members are also involved in other meetings during the course of the day, such as meetings with organizations, ministries, and delegations as well as visits by constituents and others who wish to speak with the Member. Then there are letters and enquiries to be answered, replies to be sent to the debate columns in the newspapers, speeches, addresses and papers to be prepared and written, and meetings outside the Storting, often in the evening. A considerable amount of time is spent travelling, particularly in Norway.

Many people who have seen televised transmissions from the Storting Chamber have wondered why there are often so few Members to be seen in the Chamber (“the empty Chamber”). Of course, attendance to their many duties makes it impossible for the Members to sit in the Chamber all day. An individual Member is therefore usually present in the Chamber when he or she is involved in a particular item of business, takes a special interest in a specific measure, or would like to hear what a certain Member has to say on a matter, perhaps with a view to taking part in the debate. When a Member is not in the Chamber, he or she will often be found hard at work in his or her office, where a loud speaker, closed-circuit television or Internet TV system makes it possible to follow the debates. What takes place in the Chamber is primarily a public presentation of the matter and the views of the parties.

We must also bear in mind that all items of business have been discussed thoroughly in a committee and often in party groups before they reach the floor. The merits of the case are generally spelt out clearly in the committee recommendation. The members of the Storting are required to be



The Public Gallery

present in the Chamber when the meeting is convened and to participate in all ballots (unless they are taken out of the vote or are on leave of absence). Otherwise, the primary reason for being present is to take part in the debate.

“The building on Løvebakken”



The Storting lions guard the entrance to the Storting

*The two Storting lions were drawn and modelled by the sculptor **Christopher Borch**, but were carved by two convicts from the prison at Akershus Fortress.*

“The building on Løvebakken” (Lion Hill) is a well known designation for the Storting. From as long ago as 1865, the entrance has been guarded by two stone lions, and it was a major event when the city’s first outdoor sculptures were placed in front of the Storting building.

The two Storting lions were drawn and modelled by the sculptor Christopher Borch, but were carved by two convicts from the prison at Akershus Fortress. With public

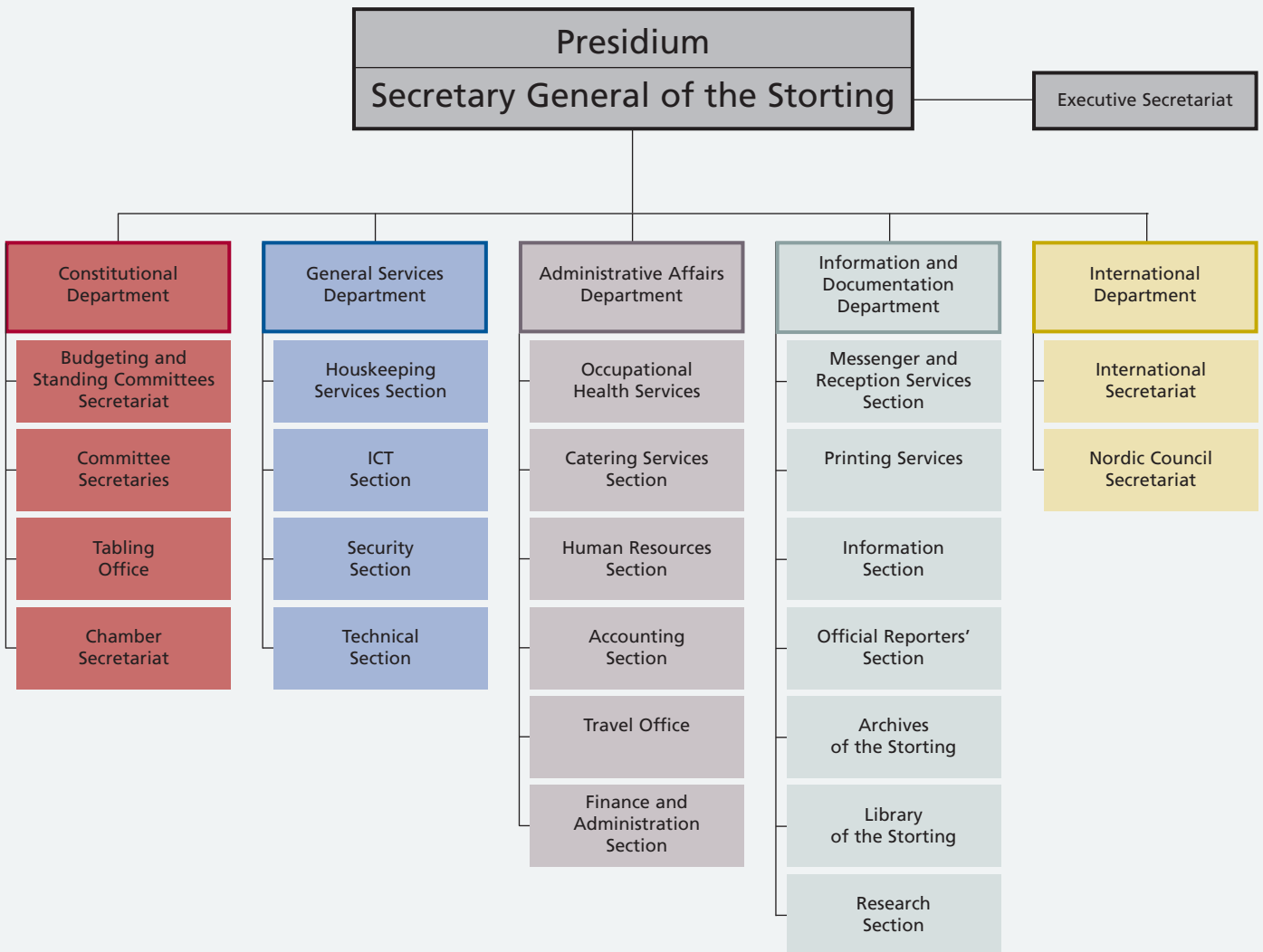
support, Borch had set up a kind of craft school for the prisoners at Akershus. Two of them had shown themselves to be good stonemasons, and were given the job of carving the two lions in red granite brought from Grefsen to the north of the City.

One of the prisoners, whose name was Sivert, was imprisoned at Akershus for a minor offence, and was set free in 1866. He was later to earn his living as a sculptor.

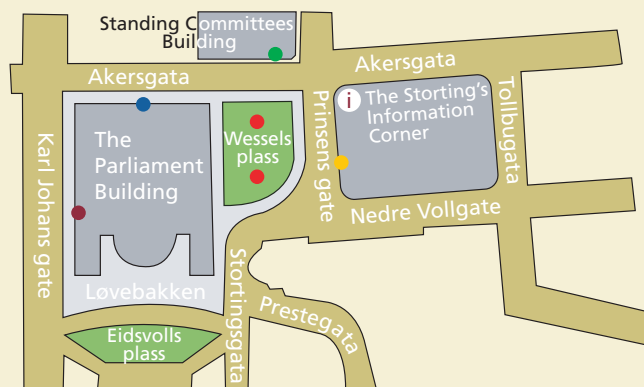
The other was serving a life sentence for a brutal murder. He had originally been

sentenced to death, but his sentence had been commuted to penal servitude for life. Most of the work on the lions was done by him, and is regarded as excellent stonemasonry for its time. The prisoner, whose name was Gudbrand Eriksen Mørstad, was set free in 1872. It is said that he was pardoned “for services to Norway’s national assembly” and, if this is true, his work on the Storting lions must really have been valued highly. When free, he emigrated with his family to America, where he became a pioneer settler on the prairies.

The Storting's administration



The Storting's Information Corner



- i The Storting's Information Corner is on the corner of Akersgata and Prinsens gate, facing Wessels plass.
- The public entrance Karl Johans gate.
- Groups/guided tours Akersgata.
- Main entrance Prinsens gate.
- Entrance to the Standing Committees Building. Public hearings. Akersgata 18.
- The Storting's learning and experiencing centres, the *MiniTing* and *2050 – The Choice is Yours* are located under Wessels plass.

Access to the Storting by the general public

- Members of the public can follow the debates from the Public Gallery. The entrance is at Karl Johans gate 22
- From September to June, guided tours of the Storting for groups can be ordered by telephone +47 23 31 31 80
- Guided tours for the general public are held on Saturdays from September to June at 10.00, 11.30 and 13.00 hrs.
- Guided tours for tourists in Norwegian and English are held from c.25 June to c.20 August, Monday–Friday, at 10.00, 11.30 and 13.00 hrs.
- Further information:
The Storting's Information Corner,
telephone +47 23 31 35 96



Service for schoolchildren, students, teachers, information workers, organizations, journalists and the general public

The Storting's Information Corner provides

- Information about the Storting and its work
- Access to public documents (reports, propositions, recommendations, records, decisions)
- Answers to questions at the information desk, by telephone, fax and e-mail
- Material concerning the Storting: fact sheets, brochures, books, DVDs and access to public records.
- Access to the Storting's website

- Transmission of debates from the Storting Chamber and hearings via closed-circuit television
- Election manifestos and political platforms of the political parties at the Storting

This service is intended for schoolchildren, students, teachers, information workers in the public and private sectors, organizations, journalists and the general public.

Opening times:

Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays: 10.00–15.00 hrs, Thursdays: 10.00–17.00 hrs. The Information Corner is closed from the beginning of July to the middle of August and during the Christmas and Easter school holidays.

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Internet: www.stortinget.no

Glossary

B

budget proceedings: work on the Fiscal Budget. Besides work on legislation and supervision of the Government and public administration, this is the most important responsibility of the Storting.

C

central government administration: government apparatus staffed by permanent officials who assist in planning and implementing all of the measures and responsibilities adopted by the political authorities.

constitution: legal system that forms the basis of how a state is governed. The written Constitution is an important part of our constitution, as are the legal rules derived from long political practice (customary constitutional law).

constitution of the Storting: The Storting assembles on the first weekday in October. When the Storting has elected its Presidents and Secretaries, the President declares the Storting lawfully constituted.

Council of State: The Government under the leadership of the King normally meets at the Royal Palace every Friday at 11.00 hrs. If the King is indisposed or is travelling abroad, the meeting is led by the Crown Prince. If the King's absence is due to travel in Norway, he may "delegate the administration of the Realm to the Council of State" (Article 13 of the Constitution).

Credentials Committee: When a new Storting assembles, the elected members bring with them credentials from their county election boards providing a mandate to take up a seat in the Storting. All of the credentials are checked by the Storting's Credentials Committee in order to ensure that the members have been elected in accordance with current statutes and regulations. The recommendation of the Credentials Committee is considered by the Storting. There have been occasions when it has been necessary to order a new election (e.g. Buskerud and Troms in 1981).

D

delegate: transfer authority, usually from one body to another, e.g. from the Storting to the Government or ministries.

dissent: disagreement, opinion that deviates from that of the majority.

E

electoral register: register of persons with the right to vote in an election.

electoral term: the four-year period of office of a Storting.

enabling Act: Act whereby the Storting delegates to the Government and public administration the drafting of further rules and regulations within the area covered by the Act.

F

faction: a party or group within a party that takes a specific standpoint in a committee or the like. Majority and minority factions are often referred to.

I

interpellation: more extensive form of question to the Government or a minister, often concerning a major and politically important matter.

L

lobbying (or lobbyism): the practice of making direct representations to Members, by individuals, organizations or companies, in order to influence and change policy and actions. Lobbyist: person or people who engage in lobbying.

M

majority government: government that has the support of a majority of the Storting.

minority government: government formed by a party or parties that do not hold a majority of the seats in the Storting.

National Budget: the Government's report to the Storting on its economic policy and developments in the country during the coming year.

N

nomination: the process by which candidates are selected prior to an election. The persons whose names are included in electoral lists are nominated by the political parties.

O

Official Norwegian Reports (NOU): series of reports of government investigations into specific matters or spheres of responsibility.

ombudsman: one or more persons appointed by the Storting to exercise judicial control of the public administration and ensure that individuals do not suffer injustice at the hands of the authorities, e.g. the Parliamentary Ombudsman.

P

party group: group consisting of the members elected from a given political party. According to the definition given in the Storting's Rules of Procedure, the term "party group" is understood to mean the member or members who were elected from a registered party which presented lists of candidates for election in at least one-third of the counties.

parliamentary party leader: leader of a party group in the Storting.

parliamentary rule (or parliamentarianism): system of government where the Government is responsible to the national assembly (in Norway, the Storting). The party or parties that shall govern is decided by a majority of the members of the Storting. The Storting can force the Government to resign through a vote of no confidence. A government need not always have the support of a majority (e.g. in the case of a minority government), but it cannot continue to rule if it is opposed by a majority. Parliamentarianism has evolved through customary constitutional law, but was written into the Constitution on 20 February 2007.

plenary Storting: full assembly of the Storting.

precedent: decision that functions as a pattern for subsequent decisions of a similar kind.

Presidium: When the Storting constitutes itself, the Storting elects a President and five Vice Presidents. These six individuals collectively constitute the Storting's Presidium and are responsible for administering the business of the Storting. The Presidents chair the sittings in alternating calendar months. In their absence, a Deputy President or temporary president may lead the meetings.

Private Member's Bill: Bill submitted by a Member of the Storting.

Private Member's Motion: Motion for decision submitted by a Member of the Storting.

proportional representation: electoral system whereby mandates are divided between the parties (electoral lists) in relation to the number of votes received by them in the election. This system has operated in Norway since 1920.

proposed amendments to the Constitution: Article 112 of the Constitution provides that proposed amendments to the Constitution shall be submitted during the first, second or third Storting of an electoral period, but shall be considered during the first, second or third Storting of the following electoral term. There will thus always be a general election between submission of a proposed amendment and the decision as to whether or not to adopt it. This allows the electorate to make its opinions known.

A two-thirds majority is required to adopt an amendment to the Constitution, and at least two-thirds of the members must be present in the Chamber to vote on any constitutional matter. Proposed amendments to the Constitution are considered by the plenary Storting. The Storting that considers the proposal may not make any amendments to it. It must either be adopted as it stands or be rejected in its entirety. Several alternative proposals are therefore often submitted in order to provide the Storting that considers them with a number of options.

Propositions to the Storting:

Proposition to the Storting (Bill): legislative Bill sent by the Government. It contains a draft enactment of a Bill which the Storting may vote over. The abbreviation for this is *Prop. X L* (session), where X is the serial number.

Propositions to the Storting may contain both a draft enactment of a Bill and a draft proposal for a resolution of the Storting (general or budget items). The abbreviation for this is *Prop. X LS* (session), where X is the serial number.

Proposition to the Storting (Resolution of the Storting):

proposal by the Government concerning a matter to be considered by the Storting. Such a Proposition often contains a proposal to allocate public funds for a specific purpose or a proposal to acquire public funds for the state in specific ways. It may also contain a proposed agreement requiring the state to act in a specific way without economic consequences. The Proposition always contains a preworded document for the Storting to vote on. The abbreviation for this is *Prop. X S* (session), where X is the serial number.

Q

quorum: When voting on ordinary matters, at least half of the members must be present, whereas two-thirds of the members must be present when voting on amendments to the Constitution.

R

Recommendation: When a committee has considered a matter, it submits a written Recommendation stating the views of the committee and proposing a decision.

reply: short statement or response. In a debate, the President must permit the exchange of brief remarks and replies provided that the Ting does not decide otherwise. The remark must be related to the speech concerned. Each speaker may speak for up to one minute. The speaker whose speech causes the debate may reply to each speaker in turn. The entire exchange of remarks may comprise up to five remarks with replies, but may be limited to three. See Section 37 of the Rules of Procedure.

Report to the Storting: orientations of the Storting by the Government on various aspects of state activities (e.g. annual reports of state enterprises and agencies, reports concerning Norway's participation in different forms of international cooperation) or plans that the Government intends to implement and which it wishes to raise in the Storting. If the Government wishes to withdraw a proposition, this must be done in the form of a Report to the Storting. Such a report is commonly referred to as a white paper.

representative democracy: In a representative (indirect) democracy, the people govern via elected representatives, who act on behalf of the people, and thereby look after the interests of the voters and are accountable to them at the next election. In direct democracy, everyone who so wishes may at all times participate in making decisions (e.g. general meetings).

Royal Assent: The King in Council approves a statute adopted by the Storting with his signature, and the Prime Minister countersigns.

Rules of Procedure: The Storting's Rules of Procedure regulate the Storting's working procedures, but do not affect all aspects of the work of the Storting. The rules, composition and functions of the Storting are laid down in the Constitution, but the Constitution does not specify all the details of working procedures.

S

Speech from the Throne: speech read by the King at the State Opening of the Storting. It contains the Government's political programme for the coming year. The Speech from the Throne is debated in the Storting.

sovereignty of the people: The power of the state is derived from the people. The people (i.e. the adult section of the population, in the case of equal and universal suffrage, the voters) has given the state the authority to adopt statutes that limit the freedom of individual citizens. In our representative system, sovereignty of the people is exercised by the Storting, which thereby governs on behalf of the people. The Government can be removed by a majority of the Storting (see parliamentary rule).

spokesperson: A standing committee appoints a spokesperson for each item of business sent to the committee. The spokesperson presents the matter to the committee, drafts the Recommendation and gives an account of the matter to the Storting.

standing committees: Some of the most important work of the Storting takes place in the 12 standing committees. Almost all matters brought before the Storting are first considered by a committee. All Members of the Storting serve on one of the 12 standing committees.

State Opening of the Storting: When the Storting has constituted itself, notification of this is given to the King. It is usual for the King to perform the State Opening of the Storting on the day after constitution of the Storting unless this is a Sunday. The King reads the Speech from the Throne, which contains the Government's political programme for the coming year. The Report on the State of the Realm is normally read by the minister who has functioned for the shortest period or by the youngest minister if all ministers have functioned equally as long.

V

voting: On the closing of a debate the recommendations of the standing committee and the proposals contained there are voted upon.

vote of confidence: When a government calls a vote of confidence in a matter, it means that it will resign if the vote goes against the Government. This applies when the Government either interprets a proposal as showing no confidence or when the Government states that it will not accept a proposal that is submitted.

W

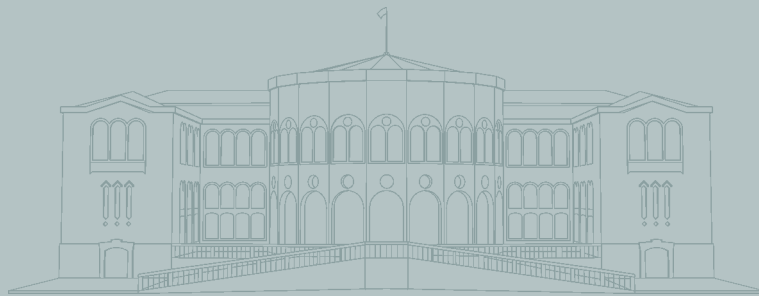
whip: the person or persons in each party group responsible for the pairing off of Members who for various reasons must be away from the Storting for short periods. In this way, the relative distribution of parties in the Storting is maintained in connection with voting.

white paper: see Report to the Storting.

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