

Information on the course of legislative work in the Senate – the perspective of the Senate Sitting Unit

The Senate Sitting Unit (a part of the Senate Proceedings Office) is responsible, in particular, for the organisation and course of plenary sessions. Therefore, it prepares documents and information to be subsequently published on the website of the Senate¹.

Acts passed by the Sejm form a vast majority of documents considered by the Senate². For this reason, the specific informative function of the Senate Sitting Unit will be described on the example of the legislative path of such a document.

An act passed by the Sejm is submitted to the Office of the Marshal of the Senate, where it is forwarded to the Senate Sitting Unit in order to prepare the so-called Senate Paper. A Senate Paper is an official and standardised document which constitutes the subject of work of Senate Committees and the Senate at a plenary session. In practice, it is prepared by creating an electronic file with the text of the act adopted. Subsequently, the Paper is published on the website of the Senate and delivered to Senators. Pursuant to an appropriate resolution of the Presidium of the Senate, Papers are delivered to Senators by publishing them on the Internet and notifying the Senators thereof. For this purpose, emails are sent. Such Papers with a given serial number and date of publication are published in the tab “Works/Senate/Papers”. The website also contains an intuitive search engine for Senate Papers, which helps find a specific Paper based on various clear criteria. Depending on the stage of work, a direct link to the Paper is made also in the tab “Works/Senate/Sittings” along with a description of a specific item on the agenda of a given sitting of the Senate. Furthermore, usually 30 hard copies of every Senate Paper are printed. The first page of a Senate Paper containing the text of an act is orange.

Once a Senate Paper containing the text of an act is prepared, it is formally submitted to a competent Senate Committee for consideration. When the Chair of a Committee receives a submission, a meeting is called in order to consider the act. Information of a meeting is also published on the Internet. It is worth mentioning that the tab devoted to the work of Senate Committees contains not only legislative documentation provided by the Legislative Office but also scans of opinions and positions of external institutions, including civic organisations.

¹ However, it should be stressed that the Senate Sitting Unit does not handle media and social communication, as these tasks are reserved to the competence of the Senate Information Centre.

² The Polish parliament consists of two chambers – the Sejm and the Senate. In principle, the Senate should consider an act passed by the Sejm within 30 days from its receipt.

Meetings are broadcasted live on the website of the Senate (tab: Broadcasts). Archive videos of meetings are available in the archive of broadcasts and agendas of meetings, which is essential considering the provision of access to public information. The outcome of work of a Committee on a given act is a report, which includes its recommendations for the Senate (to adopt an act without amendments, to amend or to reject it). Such a report is also published as a Senate Paper. It contains the same number as the act it refers to as well as the letter "A"³. In order to differentiate it from the primary Paper, the first page is yellow. An electronic version of such a Paper also contains a link to the primary Paper with the text of an act⁴. Upon publication and delivery of a report Paper to Senators, the most important information related to a Committee meeting is published on the website of the Senate, i.e. date of meeting, Committee's recommendations, full name of the Senator who will present the report at the plenary session of the Senate.

The next stage of the Senate's work on an act adopted by the Sejm is to consider it on a plenary session. Such a session is broadcasted live on the Internet, as in the case of Committees. The plenary session broadcasts are made by the Senate Sitting Unit. It should be mentioned that they are provided with interpretation into sign language. During a broadcast, an additional window with a sign language interpreter can be opened at any time.

Should a Senator submit amendments to an act under consideration at a plenary session, an additional meeting of a Committee must be held. There, a Committee will consider such amendments and submit recommendations regarding their adoption or rejection to the Senate. Such a meeting is also broadcasted on the Internet. After the meeting is over, a subsequent Senate Paper with another report is prepared. The first page of such a Paper is yellow. However, the number of the primary Paper is accompanied by the letter "Z". It is also published online.

After a debate and vote, information on the position of the Senate on the act under consideration is published on the website of the Senate, along with an electronic version of a Senate resolution concerning the act (pdf file).

For the sake of users' comfort, the aforementioned information, supplemented by the opinions on acts and reference materials prepared by the Legislative Office, is linked with a description of a given item on the agenda of a given sitting of the Senate⁵. A special file

³ Depending on the number of Committees which consider a given act, a report of each one of them (unless they hold a joint meeting) is provided with the number of the primary Paper and the next letter of the alphabet.

⁴ This is to facilitate work since it ensures faster connection between Committees' reports and the act they refer to.

⁵ There are also links to electronic versions of legislative documents used when the act was processed by the Sejm (the so-called Sejm Papers).

containing information related to every item on the agenda of the sitting, which is prepared on an on-going basis by the Senate Sitting Unit, serves as a source file for individuals who post information on the Internet. It contains a brief description of the act and basic information on the course of work in the Senate.

Furthermore, a stenographic record of a plenary session is prepared during the session on an on-going basis by the Verbatim Reports Unit (also a part of the Senate Proceedings Office). Such a record (html file) is related to the agenda of a given session and gradually published on the website of the Senate (during the session). Therefore, a stenographic record contains an interactive table of contents, which ensures access to a specific section of the text with a single click⁶.

It should be noted that the actions of the Senate Sitting Unit presented above are of great importance from the point of view of access to information related to the work of the Senate and its bodies as well as to promotion of knowledge of Polish parliamentarism.

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⁶ The html version is merely an aid/working document, whereas a printed hard copy of a stenographic record prepared within 30 days from a given session (the so-called blue stripe, which is a reference to its front cover) is the official document.