

## Legislative work of Parliament

Legislative proposals are presented to Parliament in the form of Government bills or Members' initiatives. Each year the Government submits 220-300 bills to Parliament and Members submit 150-200 initiatives. In practice the large majority of legislative amendments or new laws are introduced as Government bills. Only a few Members' initiatives lead to legislation each year.

The handling of Government bills or Members' initiatives begins with a preliminary debate in plenary session. At this stage no decisions are made regarding the content of the bill but the purpose of this debate is to provide a basis for committee work. After the preliminary debate the bill is referred to a committee.

### Always two readings

After the committee handling, a bill returns to the plenary session, where it is handled in two stages. In the case of major legislative projects the committee chairperson generally takes the floor first to present the committee's report. This is followed by a general debate. Then the content of the bill is decided section by section, with votes being conducted as necessary. Amendments are generally proposed by opposition MPs. Parliament can refer a bill to the Grand Committee after the first reading, but this is very rare.

The second reading can begin no earlier than the third day after the end of the first reading. At this time the bill is either approved or rejected. It can no longer be amended.



Most bills are handled in 2-4 months, but major legislative projects take several years. Government bills and Members' initiatives that have not been handled by the end of the electoral period automatically lapse.

All related documents and detailed information on the progress of legislation is available on the Parliament website in Finnish and Swedish.

### **Enacting constitutional laws**

A simple majority of votes is required to approve or reject ordinary laws. A majority of one vote is sufficient. A more complicated procedure must be followed if a bill regards the Constitution, however.

A bill regarding the Constitution must first be approved by a simple majority of votes on its second reading. The bill is then left in abeyance until after the next general election. The newly elected Parliament continues discussion of the bill and must approve the bill by a two-thirds majority of votes in order for it to become law. However, a bill regarding the Constitution need not wait until after the next general elections if it is declared urgent by a five-sixths majority of votes.

### **Parliament's response, ratifying and publishing a law**

After Parliament has approved a law, Parliament's response is prepared. This includes the text of the law together with Parliament's other decisions in the matter. This document is signed by the Speaker and the Secretary General and is then sent to the President of the Republic for ratification. After the President has signed it, the law is published in the statute book. The President can also refuse to ratify a law. In this case it goes back to Parliament, which can either approve the law without amendments or reject it. If Parliament again approves the law, it comes into force without ratification. If it is not approved, the matter is regarded as having lapsed.