



Research Office
Legislative Council Secretariat

Fact Sheet

Council of Elders of the German Bundestag

FSC07/14-15

General Information	
Overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Council of Elders is a cross-party, high-level deliberative body established to (a) assist the President of the Bundestag in his or her work, (b) serve as a main forum where disputes among parliamentary groups are discussed and mediated, and (c) steer the work of the Bundestag.
Organisational structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Council of Elders has 30 Members comprising the President of the Bundestag, the six Vice-Presidents and 23 other Members. Seats in the Council of Elders are distributed according to the relative strengths of the parliamentary groups in the Bundestag. At present, the composition of the Council of Elders is as follows:<ul style="list-style-type: none">(a) Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union – 15 members;(b) Social Democratic Party of Germany – nine members;(c) The Left Party – three members; and(d) Alliance 90/The Greens – three members.The parliamentary secretaries (i.e. whips) of all major parliamentary groups are represented in the Council of Elders.
Meetings of the Council of Elders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Council of Elders meets regularly each week when the Bundestag is sitting. Its meetings are attended by a representative of the Federal government, usually a Minister.

Roles and functions	
Assisting the President of the Bundestag	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the major functions of the Council of Elders is to assist the President of the Bundestag in scheduling the dates of the sittings of the Bundestag. • The Council also sets the plenary's agenda for the coming week, which includes the items of business to be dealt with (bills, motions, interpellations, etc.). In addition, it decides whether a debate is to be held on any of the points on the agenda, on the length of such a debate, and on its structure. • The proposed agenda agreed by the Council of Elders are recommended to the plenary for adoption.
Serving as the main forum for agreement between parliamentary groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council of Elders is the main forum for parliamentary groups to negotiate on issues and reach agreements. At the beginning of each electoral term, the Council is the place for parliamentary groups to decide on the allocation of chairmanships and deputy chairmanships of various committees. • On the issues related to committee business, the President endeavors to achieve cross-party agreement to ensure the smooth functioning of the Bundestag. Issues for discussion may include committee schedules, the referral of bills to committees, items relating to European Union legislations, and issues relating to the rights of Members. Disputes that arise during plenary sittings between parliamentary groups are often settled at the meetings of the Council of Elders.
Steering the work of the Bundestag	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Another major function of the Council of Elders is to take decisions on the internal business of the Bundestag, except where such matters are reserved for the President or the Presidium.⁽¹⁾ For example, the Council of Elders prepares the Bundestag's budget, which funds the annual parliamentary operating cost.

Note: (1) The President of the Bundestag, together with all the six Vice-Presidents, form the Presidium. On top of presiding in plenary sittings and representing the Bundestag, members of the Presidium perform various administrative functions. For example, the Presidium approves the promotion of staff in the middle and upper management levels and concludes important contracts. It also handles issues relating to breaches of the code of conduct.

Roles and functions (cont'd)

Steering the work of the Bundestag (cont'd)

- The Council of Elders also decides on the allocation of rooms to parliamentary groups, the general administration of facilitates and services in the Bundestag, and issues relating to Members' staff. It has established the following commissions to provide support on specific issues:
 - (a) Commission on the legal status of Members of the Bundestag;
 - (b) Commission on the allocation of rooms;
 - (c) Commission on matters relating to Members' personal staff;
 - (d) Commission on the use of new information and communication technologies and media; and
 - (e) Commission on the internal affairs of the Bundestag.

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References

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