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Standing Orders of the Council of States (SO-CS)

of 20 June 2003 (Status as of 3 March 2025)

The Council of States,

on the basis of Article 36 of the Parliament Act of 13 December 2002¹ (ParlA),
and having considered the report of the Political Institutions Committee of the
Council of States of 31 March 2003²,

decrees:

Chapter 1 Accession to the Council

Art. 1 Notification by the Cantons

The Council acknowledges the notifications by the Cantons concerning the results of elections to the Council of States.

Art. 2 Swearing-in

¹ After the Council has acknowledged the notifications by the Cantons concerning elections to the Council of States, the newly-elected Council members shall swear the oath or make the solemn promise. Council members who have been directly re-elected are not sworn in again.

² All persons present in the chamber and in the gallery shall rise for the swearing-in.

³ The President shall request the Secretary-General to read out the solemn promise or oath.

⁴ Persons swearing the oath raise shall three fingers of their right hand and say the words «I swear»; persons making the solemn promise say the words «I solemnly promise».

AS 2003 3645

¹ SR 171.10

² BBl 2003 3508

Chapter 2 Organs

Section 1 Election of the Presiding College and of the Office

Art. 3

¹ The Council shall elect the members of the Presiding College and of the Office individually at the beginning of each winter session.

² Immediate re-election to the same office is not possible, apart from to the office in accordance with Article 5 paragraph 1 letter d.

³ If the office of a member of the Office becomes vacant during the term of office, the Council shall elect a substitute member for the remaining period; if the post of President becomes vacant, the Council shall hold a substitute election if the President leaves office before the start of the summer session.

Section 2 President and Presiding College

Art. 4

¹ The President shall fulfil the tasks conferred on him or her by law and:

- a. chair the Council meetings;
- b. establish the agenda, subject to Council decisions to the contrary, taking into consideration the programme of the parliamentary session established by the Office;
- c. chair the Presiding College and the Council Office;
- d. represent the Council in its external dealings.

² If the President is unable to chair the meeting, or wishes by way of exception to participate in a debate, he or she shall be replaced provisionally by the First Vice-President, or if need be, by the Second Vice-President.

³ If neither Vice-President is able to chair the meeting, the presidency shall be assumed by the following persons:

- a. a predecessor; if more than one is present in the Council, the council member who more recently exercised the office shall take precedence;
- b. the council member who has served the most terms of office; if two or more council members have served the same term, the older member shall take precedence.

⁴ The Vice-Presidents:

- a. support the President;
- b. carry out with the President the tasks conferred on the Presiding College by law.

⁵ Decisions of the Presiding College require the approval of at least two of its members.

Section 3 The Office

Art. 5 Composition and procedure

¹ The Office comprises:

- a. the three members of the Presiding College;
- b. a Teller;
- c. a Deputy Teller;
- d. a further member from each group of the Federal Assembly with at least five members in the Council of States which is not represented among the members of the Office under letters a–c.

² The Office is subject to the procedural rules of the committees.

Art. 6 Tasks

¹ The Office:

- a. plans the activities of the Council and establishes the session programme, subject to decisions by the Council to modify the list of items of business, or to add or withdraw such items;
- b. sets the remit of the standing committees and institutes special committees;
- c. allocates business to the committees for preliminary debate, co-reporting or final examination and sets deadlines; it may delegate this task to the President;
- d. coordinates the activities of the committees;
- e. examines, at the request of the Finance Committee, whether a committee responsible for the preliminary examination of a matter should seek an opinion from the Finance Committee under Article 49 paragraph 5 ParLA;
- f. schedules the meetings of the committees for the year;
- g. elects the presidents, vice-presidents, and members of the committees, unless the law provides otherwise;
- h. ascertains the results of elections and votes; the President may call on other members of the council if the Tellers and their replacements are impeded;
- i. examines whether incompatibilities exist under Article 14 letters b–f ParLA, and, if necessary, requests the Council to confirm the existence of any incompatibility;
- j. handles all other issues of organisation and procedure in the Council.

² The Office shall consult the presidents of the committees before taking decisions on matters concerning paragraph 1 letters b, c, and f.

³ Council members have three days in which to contest an election under paragraph 1 letter g and propose the nomination of another member of the Council; the decision rests with the Council.

Section 4 Committees and Delegations

Art. 7 Standing Committees

¹ The following standing committees exist:

1. Finance Committee (FC);
2. Control Committee (CC);
3. Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC);
4. Science, Education and Culture Committee (SECC);
5. Social Security and Health Committee (SSHC);
6. Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy Committee (ESPEC);
7. Security Policy Committee (SPC);
8. Transport and Telecommunications Committee (TTC);
9. Economic Affairs and Taxation Committee (EATC);
10. Political Institutions Committee (PIC);
11. Legal Affairs Committee (LAC);
- 12.³ ...

² The standing committees have 13 members.⁴

Art. 8 Special committees

In exceptional cases, the Office may institute special committees. Prior to doing so, it shall consult the presidents of the standing committees whose area of competence may be affected.

Art. 9 Delegations

Unless otherwise provided in an act or ordinance of the Federal Assembly, the provisions on committees set out in the Parliament Act and in these Standing Orders apply *mutatis mutandis* to the standing and non-standing delegations.

Art. 10 Legislature Planning Committee

The Legislature Planning Committee is constituted in the first session of the legislative period of the National Council as the special committee for the preliminary examination of the Federal Council's report on the legislature plan.

³ Repealed by No I of the SD of 20 March 2008, with effect from 1 April 2008 (AS 2008 1215; BB1 2008 1861 1863).

⁴ Amended by No I of the SD of 20 March 2008, in force since 1 April 2008 (AS 2008 1215; BB1 2008 1861 1863).

Art. 11 Sub-committees

¹ Every committee may establish its own sub-committees from its members.⁵

² The committee shall issue the sub-committee with an assignment that specifies its task and sets a deadline for the submission of its reports.

Art. 12 Tasks of the President

¹ The President of the committee:

- a. plans the work of the committee;
- b. sets the agenda, subject to contrary decisions by the committee;
- c. chairs the meetings of the committee;
- d. represents the committee in its external dealings.

² If the President is unable to act, Article 4 paragraph 2 and 3 applies *mutatis mutandis*.

³ The President shall participate in votes held by the committee. In the event of a tie, he or she has the casting vote.

Art. 13 Term of office

¹ The term of office of all committee members is four years, subject to contrary provisions contained in the Parliament Act or in an ordinance of the Federal Assembly. It ends at the latest with the total renewal of the committees in the first session of the new legislative period. Re-election is possible.

² The term of office of presidents and vice-presidents of the standing committees is two years. Immediate re-election to the same office is not possible.

³ The term of office of the members of a special committee corresponds to the duration of the committee's activity.

⁴ If a seat on the committee becomes vacant, the person elected to fill the seat on the committee serves out the remainder of the term of office.

Art. 14 Substitution

¹ A committee member may be substituted for a single meeting or individual meeting days.

² If a committee member leaves the Council, the parliamentary group shall nominate a replacement, as long as the Office has not assigned another member to the position.

³ The committee secretariat shall be notified of the replacement member under paragraphs 1 and 2 without delay.

⁴ Members of the Control Committee and members of a Parliamentary Investigation Committee, or their sub-committees, may not be substituted by another member.

⁵ Amended by No I of the SD of 30 Sept. 2022 (Appointing Subcommittees), in force since 28 Nov. 2022 (AS 2022 677; BBl 2022 301, 433).

⁵ A member of a sub-committee may only be replaced by another member of the main committee.

Art. 15 Informing the public

¹ The president or members selected by the committee shall inform the media in written or oral form of the main results of the committee's deliberations.

² The information provided generally includes the main decisions taken, the results of any votes and the principal arguments presented in the course of the deliberations.

³ Persons present at the meetings shall not release any information before the committee has released its official communication.

⁴ Any information regarding views expressed by persons present at the meeting or how they voted shall remain confidential, unless they decide to submit a minority proposal to the Council.

Art. 16 Reporting

¹ For every item of business, the committee shall nominate one of its members to report to the Council and to present the proposals of the committee.

² The committee may deliver a written report to the Council. It does so particularly if no other official explanatory document exists.

Chapter 3 Procedure

Section 1

Preliminary Examination, Allocation and Examination of Items of Business

Art. 17 Preliminary examination

¹ Items of business under Article 71 ParIA is subject to preliminary examination by the responsible committees; exceptions there from are:

- a. procedural requests by the members of the council and groups;
- b. candidates for election;
- c. points of order;
- d. statements made by the Federal Council;
- e. other items of business stipulated by law or by these Standing Orders.

² At the request of the cantons, the committees shall hear the opinions of the cantons with regard to the feasibility of implementation of legislation enacted by the Federal Assembly.

³ A procedural request may be subjected to preliminary examination if the responsible committee or the Council so decides.

⁴ ...⁶

Art. 18 Allocation

¹ New items of business are generally allocated to a committee for preliminary examination as soon as possible.

² A Federal Council report may be allocated directly to the responsible committee. The committee may request the Office to include the report in the session programme.

Art. 19 Examination of formal legality

¹ A parliamentary initiative or procedural request submitted by a member of the Council shall be examined for its formal legality by the President on its submission.

² The evaluation of formal legality according to Article 71 ParlA is only conducted by the President on request. If the item of business is pending in the Federal Assembly, the President of the National Council shall be consulted.

³ If an item of items of business is declared inadmissible by the President, the author may appeal to the Office. The decision of the Office is final.

Art. 20 Communication to the Council of the results of the preliminary examination

¹ Legislative bills produced by a committee or proposals submitted by the committee responsible for the preliminary examination of a legislative bill put forward by the Federal Council must be sent to members of the Council at least fourteen days before they are due to come before the Council; this rule does not apply to legislative bills examined by both chambers in the same session (Art. 85 ParlA).

² If the documents are not submitted in time, the Office shall consider removing the item of business from the session programme.

Art. 20a⁷

⁶ Repealed by No I of the SD of 17 June 2011 (Council body responsible for application to lift immunity), with effect from 5 Dec. 2011 (AS **2011** 4635; BBl **2010** 7345 7385).

⁷ Inserted by No I of the CS SD of 4 May 2020 (Sessions outside the Parliament Building), in force from 4 May 2020 until the CS sits in the Parliament Building again (7 Sept. 2020) (AS **2020** 1605; BBl **2020** 4315).

Section 2 Business and Procedure

a. Parliamentary Initiatives and Procedural Requests

Art. 21 Submission

A member of the Council may submit a parliamentary initiative or a procedural request in writing during the Council sitting.

Art. 22 Statement of reasons

¹ The wording of a parliamentary initiative and of a procedural request must not contain a statement of reasons.

² The Council member must add a statement of reasons to a parliamentary initiative, motion or a postulate.⁸

Art. 23 Answering of procedural requests

The addressee of a procedural request shall respond to the request in writing by the next ordinary session following submission of the request. If the addressee of a procedural request is unable to respond to the request within the specified period, he or she shall inform the Office and the author stating a reason for the delay.

Art. 24 Procedure in the Council

¹ Motions, postulates and interpellations shall generally be considered during the ordinary session following their submission.

² If a procedural request and an item of business pending in the Council relate to the same matter, the two may be considered together.

³ An interpellant may declare his or her satisfaction with the Federal Council's response, even if the Council refuses to debate the interpellation.

Art. 25 Co-signatories

¹ A parliamentary initiative or procedural request may be signed by more than one council member. The member signing first is considered the author.

^{1bis} ...⁹

² The author may withdraw the initiative or request without approval of the co-signatories.

⁸ Amended by No I of the SD of 21 June 2013 (Improvements in the Organisation and Procedures of Parliament), in force since 25 Nov. 2013 (AS **2013** 3695; BBl **2011** 6793 6829).

⁹ Inserted by No I of the CS SD of 4 May 2020 (Sessions outside the Parliament Building), in force from 4 May 2020 until the CS sits in the Parliament Building again (7 Sept. 2020) (AS **2020** 1605; BBl **2020** 4315).

Art. 26 Urgent treatment

¹ An interpellation or a question may be declared urgent.

² The Office is responsible for the declaration of urgency.

³ An urgent question must be submitted at the latest one week before the close of the session, and in one-week sessions on the first day. It shall be answered by the Federal Council in writing within three weeks.¹⁰

⁴ The Office may with the consent of its author convert an urgent interpellation into an urgent question.¹¹

b. Statements**Art. 27¹²** Statement by the Council of States

¹ At the written request of a member of the Council or a committee, the Council may make a statement on important events or on foreign or domestic policy matters.

² Any member of the Council may submit requests for amendment in response to a request for a statement.

³ The Council shall first decide whether it wishes to hold a debate. If it decides not to hold a debate, the requests are regarded as having been dealt with. If it decides to hold a debate, it shall revise the requests in accordance with Articles 78 and 79 ParlA. The Council shall either accept or reject the revised draft of the statement.

⁴ If the Council decides to hold a debate, it may have the requests subjected to a preliminary examination by the committee responsible. If the committee does not submit its requests by the start of the next ordinary session, the Council shall decide either to hold a debate or abandon the requests.

Art. 28 Statement by the Federal Council

¹ The Federal Council may make a statement to the Council on important events or on foreign or domestic policy matters.

² At the request of a member, the Council may decide to hold a discussion on the statement.

¹⁰ Amended by No I of the SD of 21 June 2013 (Improvements in the Organisation and Procedures of Parliament), in force since 25 Nov. 2013 (AS **2013** 3695; BBl **2011** 6793 6829).

¹¹ Amended by No I of the SD of 21 June 2013 (Improvements in the Organisation and Procedures of Parliament), in force since 25 Nov. 2013 (AS **2013** 3695; BBl **2011** 6793 6829).

¹² Amended by No I of the SD of 20 Dec. 2024 (Procedure for Statements and Paternity Leave as Grounds for being Excused), in force since 3 March 2025 (AS **2024** 794).

c.¹³ Lifting Immunity

Art. 28a

The Legal Affairs Committee is responsible for dealing with requests to lift the immunity of a Council member, a member of the Federal Council, the Federal Chancellor or federal judges, or similar requests.

Section 3 Organisation of Council Sitzings

Art. 29 Agenda

¹ Notice is given of the agenda as follows:

- a. for the first sitting of a session: when the session programme is sent out;
- b. for other sittings: at the end of the preceding sitting.

² The agenda lists all items of business.

³ The President may exceptionally add items to the agenda during the sitting, in particular in order to deal with differences and deferred matters for consideration.

Art. 30 Minutes

¹ In the cases under Article 44 paragraph 2, the Clerk to the Council shall take the minutes in the language of the President. The minutes shall state:

- a. the matters that have been discussed;
- b. the proposals made;
- c. the result of the votes and elections;
- d. the members of the Council who have been excused.¹⁴

² The President shall approve the minutes.

Art. 31 Quorum

The President shall verify whether the Council is quorate:

- a. before elections, votes on entire bills and final votes as well as votes on provisions that require the approval of a majority of the members of the Council in accordance with Article 159 paragraph 3 of the Federal Constitution¹⁵ in order to be accepted;
- b. at the request of a member of the Council.

¹³ Inserted by No I of the SD of 17 June 2011 (Council body responsible for application to lift immunity), in force since 5 Dec. 2011 (AS **2011** 4635; BBl **2010** 7345 7385).

¹⁴ Amended by No I of the SD of 22 March 2013 (Electronic Voting Equipment), in force since 1 March 2014 (AS **2014** 251; BBl **2012** 9463).

¹⁵ SR **101**

Art. 32 Attendance

¹ The President opens the sitting. The roll is then called.

² Members of the Council shall notify the Clerk to the Council, if possible before the sitting, if they are unable to attend.

Art. 33 Dress code

All persons present in the chamber shall wear appropriate attire.

Art. 34 Call to Order

¹ The President shall call persons attending a sitting to order who:

- a. make insulting or irrelevant remarks or infringe other procedural rules;
- b. by their conduct disrupt Council proceedings.

² If the call to order is disregarded, the President may order that disciplinary measures be taken in accordance with Article 13 paragraph 1 ParlA.

³ The Council shall decide without discussion on objections made by the person concerned.

Section 4 Council Debates**Art. 35** Requesting and granting the right to speak

¹ In the Council, no one may speak unless granted the right to do so by the President.

² Anyone who wishes to speak must submit a request to do so to the President.

³ The President shall normally grant the right to speak in the following order:

- a. the committee rapporteur;
- b. committee members;
- c. members of the Council.

⁴ Members of the Council shall generally be granted the right to speak in the order in which their requests are received.

⁵ The committee rapporteurs and the representative of the Federal Council shall be allowed to speak when they request to do so.

⁶ Members of the Council shall be granted the right to speak out of turn if they wish to make a point of order or personal statement.

Art. 36 Personal statement

Any member of the Council may make a brief personal statement; this may be used to respond to a comment relating to his or her person or in order to rectify a statement that he or she has made.

Art. 37 Introduction and detailed consideration

¹ The Council may dispense with an introductory debate, unless a proposal is submitted not to approve introduction.

² It may decide to debate an item of business article by article, in sections or in its entirety.

Art. 38 Proposals

¹ A proposed amendment must be submitted to the President in writing and normally before the debate on the item of business concerned.

l^{bis} ...¹⁶

² He or she shall examine the proposed amendments on their filing to confirm that they fulfil the formal requirements.

³ A proposed amendment shall be subject to a preliminary examination by the committee responsible if the Council so decides.

Art. 39 Points of order

¹ The Council shall usually deal with a point of order immediately.

² It shall decide without discussion on any proposal for reconsideration, after hearing a brief statement of reasons for the proposal and any counter-proposal.

³ If the Council votes in favour of the proposal for reconsideration, the article or section shall be debated again.

Art. 40 Conclusion of the debate

The President closes the debate if there are no further requests to speak.

Art. 41 Second reading

¹ An item of business that has been substantially amended due to proposals from the floor of the Council shall be returned for editorial revision to the committee responsible for the preliminary examination, if the Council so decides.

² The revised text shall be submitted to the Council for approval as a whole.

¹⁶ Inserted by No I of the CS SD of 4 May 2020 (Sessions outside the Parliament Building), in force from 4 May 2020 until the CS sits in the Parliament Building again (7 Sept. 2020) (AS **2020** 1605; BBl **2020** 4315).

Section 5 Voting

Art. 42 Wording of the question

Before the vote, the President shall provide a brief summary of the proposed amendments made and submit proposals to the Council on the question and on the order of voting in accordance with Articles 78 and 79 ParIA.

Art. 43 Abstention and statement of reasons for the vote

¹ No member of the Council is obliged to vote.

² Prior to votes on entire bills and final votes on legislative bills, as well as votes in which the approval of a majority of members of the Council is required under Article 159 paragraph 3 of the Federal Constitution¹⁷, each member of the Council shall be entitled to state briefly the reasons for his or her vote or abstention.

Art. 44¹⁸ Voting

¹ Each member of the Council votes from his or her desk using the electronic voting system.

² If sittings are held in camera or if the electronic voting equipment is defective, voting is by show of hands or roll call.

Art. 44a¹⁹ Recordings and publishing voting data

¹ The electronic voting system counts and records the votes cast in every vote.

² The way in which the members of the Council vote and the result are shown on electronic display panels.

³ The President announces the result.

⁴ The result is published in the form of a list of names.²⁰

⁵ On the list of names, for each member it is indicated whether he or she:

- a. votes yes;
- b. votes no;
- c. abstains;
- d. does not participate in the vote; or
- e. is excused.

¹⁷ SR 101

¹⁸ Amended by No I of the SD of 22 March 2013 (Electronic Voting Equipment), in force since 1 March 2014 (AS 2014 251; BBl 2012 9463).

¹⁹ Inserted by No I of the SD of 22 March 2013 (Electronic Voting Equipment), in force since 1 March 2014 (AS 2014 251; BBl 2012 9463).

²⁰ Amended by No I of the SD of 17 Dec. 2021 (List of Names for All Votes), in force since 28 Feb. 2022 (AS 2022 107; BBl 2021 2696).

⁶ A person is regarded as excused if he or she gives notice of being unable to attend an entire day's sitting at the latest by the start of the sitting due to an assignment from a permanent delegation in accordance with Article 60 ParlA or due to close family bereavement, maternity or paternity leave, accident or illness.²¹

^{6bis} A person is regarded as partially excused if he or she gives notice of being unable to attend part of a day's sitting at the latest by the start of the sitting due to an assignment from a parliamentary body.²²

⁷ ...²³

Art. 45 Voting by a show of hands²⁴

¹ When voting by a show of hands in accordance with Article 44 paragraph 2, the votes need not be counted if the result of the vote is obvious.²⁵

² The number of votes cast and the number of abstentions must be counted in every case in the case of:

- a. votes on entire bills;
- b. final votes;
- c. votes that require the approval of a majority of the members of the Council in accordance with Article 159 paragraph 3 of the Federal Constitution²⁶ in order to be accepted.

Art. 46²⁷ Roll call voting

¹ Voting takes place in the cases under Article 44 paragraph 2 by calling the roll if this is requested by at least 10 members of the Council.

² In a vote by calling the roll, the members of the Council respond from their seats in alphabetical order of their names to question put to the vote by the President with a «Yes», «No» or «Abstain».

³ The only vote that counts is that cast immediately after the member's name is read out.

⁴ After each response, the Council Secretary announces the interim result.

²¹ Amended by No I of the SD of 20 Dec. 2024 (Procedure for Statements and Paternity Leave as Grounds for being Excused), in force since 3 March 2025 (AS **2024** 794).

²² Inserted by No I of the SD of 20 March 2015 (Amendment of the Grounds for being excused), in force since 1 June 2015 (AS **2015** 1295; BBl **2015** 2239).

²³ Repealed by No I of the SD of 17 Dec. 2021 (List of Names for All Votes), with effect from 28 Feb. 2022 (AS **2022** 107; BBl **2021** 2696).

²⁴ Amended by No I of the SD of 22 March 2013 (Electronic Voting Equipment), in force since 1 March 2014 (AS **2014** 251; BBl **2012** 9463).

²⁵ Amended by No I of the SD of 22 March 2013 (Electronic Voting Equipment), in force since 1 March 2014 (AS **2014** 251; BBl **2012** 9463).

²⁶ **SR 101**

²⁷ Amended by No I of the SD of 22 March 2013 (Electronic Voting Equipment), in force since 1 March 2014 (AS **2014** 251; BBl **2012** 9463).

⁵ The result is published in the form of a list of names, other than in the case of sittings held in camera.

Chapter 4 House Rules

Art. 47 Access to the chamber and its antechambers

¹ The following persons are allowed access to the Chamber and its anterooms (the Lobby and Antechamber) during the sessions:

- a. members of the Federal Assembly;
- b. members of the Federal Council and the Federal Chancellor;
- c. members of the Federal Supreme Court representing the federal courts on matters of business in accordance with Article 162 paragraph 2 ParlA;
- d. Parliamentary Services staff, as their duties require;
- e. staff accompanying members of the Federal Council, the Federal Chancellor or members of the Federal Supreme Court, as their duties require;
- f. photographers and camera crew bearing a pass issued by Parliamentary Services.

² During sessions, accredited journalists and the persons holding an entry pass in accordance with Article 69 paragraph 2 ParlA also have access to the antechambers.

³ The gallery is open to the public, while the press gallery is open to accredited journalists.

⁴ In the case of sittings in camera (Art. 4 para. 2 and 3 ParlA), only the persons specified in paragraph 1 letters a–d have access to the Chamber and to its antechambers. The galleries shall be cleared.

⁵ The President may issue further regulations on access to the Chamber, its antechambers and the galleries; in particular he or she may impose time limits on the right to visit the gallery when there are large numbers of visitors.

⁶ The President may issue regulations on the use of the rooms while the Council is not in session.

Art. 48 Conduct of visitors to the Chamber

¹ Visitors to the galleries shall remain quiet. They shall in particular refrain from any audible expression of approval or disapproval. Picture or sound recordings are only permitted with authorisation of the Parliamentary Services.

² The President shall order unauthorised persons to be removed from the Chamber.

³ He or she shall order authorised persons who are not members of the Council to be removed from the Chamber or visitors to be removed from the gallery if, having been warned, they continue to behave inappropriately or to cause a disturbance.

⁴ The President shall suspend the proceedings if order in the Chamber or in the galleries cannot be restored immediately.

Chapter 5 Final Provisions

Art. 49 Repeal of current legislation

The Standing Orders of the Council of States of 24 September 1986²⁸ are repealed.

Art. 50 Commencement

These Standing Orders come into force together with the Parliament Act on 1 December 2003.

²⁸ [AS 1987 2; 1991 2340; 1994 2151; 1995 4360; 1997 1475; 1998 785; 1999 2614; 2000 1 and 241].