

UNION INTERPARLEMENTAIRE



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Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments

CONTRIBUTION

from

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To the Communication on

METHODS FOR PREPARING A SESSION OF PARLIAMENT

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I. **Members of the Bureau**

The Bureau of the House of Representatives is composed of the Speaker – or in his absence by any of the four Vice-Presidents – and two Secretaries General, who can be substituted either by any of the two Joint-Secretaries or both.

The Speaker, the Vice-Presidents, the Secretaries General and the Joint-Secretaries are elected by the Plenary. Whereas the Speaker and the Vice-Presidents are in-service Members of Parliament, the Secretaries General and Joint-Secretaries are not.

The Speaker of the House steers the plenary sessions with the direct and personal assistance of the Secretaries General.

II. **Classification of the activities for the arrangements of the sessions**

The activities for the arrangements of a plenary session can be analysed from both political and administrative points of view:

(a) The **political arrangement** aims at decision-making on whatever will take place at the Plenary Session, taking into account the convenience and opportunity criteria of party interests of the House political sectors. Such arrangement is carried out mainly at the Coordinating meeting, a body composed of one delegate from each political sector, the Speaker, the Vice-Presidents, the Secretaries General and the Joint-Secretaries of the House of Representatives. At such meeting, the members would agree on the way the sessions will be held and the items will be addressed on the Agenda, which supplementary items to be considered, the MP's addressing the plenary and their speeches, the regulations and constitutional majorities required by each issue, the relevance of raising political issues, parliamentary privileges, setting up Special Committees or Commissions of enquiry, etc. The agreement reached by the Coordinating meeting is not binding, and for this reason, many times the plenary session development failed to comply with it, generally for political reasons. At the Coordinating Meeting the Secretaries General and Joint-Secretaries play a constitutional, legal and regulatory advice role for the relevant requests submitted by the political coordinators.

(b) The **administrative arrangements** imply the involvement of the Secretaries General of the House at different stages prior to the session, including:

- preparation of the agenda,

- delivery of the agenda and documents related to items under consideration for Members of Parliament
- the procedure of new issues, and
- allocation to the Committee which will address each issue.

The **Agenda** is the list of issues for which the House of Representatives has been convened. The agenda should have a maximum of ten items for ordinary sessions, in spite of the fact that emergency items on other subjects can be submitted during the Session. An outstanding duty carried out by the Secretaries General is the preparation of the Agenda, for which they should take into account three main criteria:

- regulation, which imposes the inclusion of issues being reported by the Committees, and therefore included in the order the Secretaries General have been submitted,
- the one which imposes a binding motion approved in a previous session postpone an issue that should have been addressed in it or include a subject in a Session for a certain date,
- the political one, arising from the Coordinating meeting decisions
- the relevant one, which imposes the urgency to address certain issues as soon as possible due to expiry dates, social or economic emergency reasons, etc.

According to what was previously stated, it rises the importance of the performance of the Secretaries General in drafting the Agenda, since they must have the right weighing on different aspects involved in the several subjects that must be included.

Members of Parliament have to be informed of all the subjects related to their function, and, thus, the Secretariat has to fulfil the advertising requirement, informing them of all the issues submitted to the House as well as the issues officially remitted to different institutions by its Members in exercise of their competences. To this end, the Secretariat produces a **“Folder of Included Issues”**, to be circulated to all Members of Parliament before the beginning of the Plenary Session and included in their Session folder.

This folder namely comprehends:

- the Executive Power communications related to enacted legislation
- the list of bills that the Executive Power remitted to the General Assembly and that is subsequently sent in a primary stage to the House of Representatives,
- the details of bills sent by the Senate for consideration by the Chamber of Deputies,

- the communications made by the Senate regarding the passing of bills, considered in a second stance,
- the passing of bills in a new format, which has been previously approved by the House of Representatives,
- the list of bills, draft resolutions, declarations or minutes of communication submitted by Members of Parliament,
- the enumeration of information requested by MPs under Article 118 of the Constitution of Uruguay, which aims to provide data to the Legislators for the exercise of their oversight role.
- different public bodies communications on various issues, such as the responses to information requests, regarding information required by parliamentary Committees, etc.
- the news on reports prepared by Committees regarding the items under consideration, making it possible to include them in subsequent agendas,
- the request of a parliamentary Committee to file an issue, and
- any kind of communications made by both public and private institutions.

The Secretariat decides on the destination of any legislative issue, stating it in the folder the Committee properly understands for consideration in view of the subject, and this destination can only be changed if any Member of Parliament proposes another Committee or subsequently by a motion of procedure correction in a Plenary Session.

Another significant aspect of the preparation of a Plenary Session is “**document oversight**” regarding the subject to be addressed, and in this sense, its relevance and background are verified and analyzed, taking into account if any special majority is required as well as considering the bill drafting, its punctuation and structure, etc.

Plenary Sessions are open, and, therefore, in some occasions, pending on public expectations on the issues to be addressed, it is essential that control measures be taken regarding public access to the Session, as well as actions to prevent incidents. Such preventive measures aim at ensuring the smooth running of the Session as well as the personal safety of both Members and Parliamentary Staff in order to avoid outrages, and if such outrages outbreak, the galleries are to be cleared immediately according to the Rules of the House of Representatives.

III. Conclusions

According to what it has been set out above, it raises the significant role of the Secretaries General in the preparation of the Plenary Sessions of the House of Representatives, since it implies situations threatening the smooth running of the Plenary Session and the wrong implementation of constitutional, legal and regulation rules.

The Secretaries General will be the first to be accounted for mistakes in reference to any abnormal situation raised during the Plenary Session, including: mistakes in the documents to be considered, administrative and operating problems, failure to comply with rules stating majorities for certain issues, etc.

In the exercise of their duties as Secretaries General, they have to be impartial, acting in any situation disregarding their political-party affiliation, according to the decisions taken by political coordinators and implementing relevant constitutional, legal and regulation rules.

To conclude, my aim was to provide a glimpse of the way the Uruguayan Parliament rules its procedures for the exercise of one its dearest democratic institutions. I would like to thank you for your time devoted to reading this summary and trust it could prove helpful and of inspiration in your own Houses of Parliament.