CITIZENS' CHAMBER

A BLUEPRINT FOR A NEW DEMOCRACY

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1. Introduction

Let me walk you around the new Polish Parliament. As before, it includes the Sejm and the Senate – respectively the lower and upper houses. Their roles and tasks have generally remained unchanged. The Sejm is the central place where laws are passed. The Senate, on the other hand, is still able to propose amendments to bills and accept them in their entirety or reject them. Not many changes here. However, something completely new has appeared in the Parliament – a third house – the Citizens' Chamber. Its members are not elected but are selected at random, and any person who has the right to participate in elections may be chosen. Random selection is carried out in such a way as to create Poland 'in a nutshell', which means taking into account demographic criteria such as gender, age, level of education, region and one's place of residence – a large, medium or small city or village.

In practice, the Citizens' Chamber functions in the same way as citizens' assemblies in Polish cities and other places in the world but with a significant difference, which is suggested by its name – it can pass bills. That is why it is called a 'chamber' – that is, part of the Parliament. It consists of 500 people – more than the Sejm, which numbers 460 people, and also more than the Senate, which consists of 100 people. The decisions of the Citizens' Chamber are final in the sense that the laws adopted by it are not subject to approval by the Sejm or the President. However, bills adopted by the Citizens' Chamber may be referred to the Constitutional Court to verify their compliance with the constitution.

To all intents and purposes, the introduction of a citizens' chamber to the Parliament entails the creation of a new political system, a hybrid system which includes both elected bodies plus a body composed of members of the public (selected at random), which is a characteristic element of deliberative democracy.

These three bodies – the Citizens' Chamber, the Sejm and the Senate – can function harmoniously, with the appropriate division of tasks in the jurisprudence process and the establishment of institutions accompanying the Citizens' Chamber whose role is to support its activities (for example, there may be a legal bureau that employs lawyers specialising in writing bills). In other words, a deliberative democracy needs an entire environment to flourish.

NEW PARLIAMENT IN POLAND

SEJM

- 460 members
- A permanent chamber
- Members elected through general elections
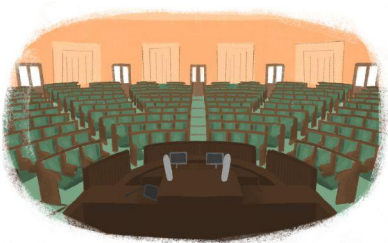
SENATE

- 100 members
- A permanent chamber
- Members elected through general elections

CITIZENS' CHAMBER

- 500 members
- Chamber initiated for a specific topic
- Members selected at random from members of the public

So far, citizens' assemblies worldwide usually adopt recommendations that, given enough political will, could be implemented but could also be rejected. In this political system, however, the Citizens' Chamber makes final decisions, which are translated into bills, and adopted by this very Chamber. This process of creating new law also involves MPs, senators, the President, representatives of NGOs or academic institutions, and all citizens interested in a given issue; they can all submit comments and proposals.

The key element of this model is that the members of the Citizens' Chamber do not write the bills themselves but delegate this task to experts. It is their role, however, to set out the main elements that the new bill is to include as well as indicate the values on which it is based. For instance, when deciding to provide more significant support for organic farming, the Citizens' Chamber may decide on new rules for granting subsidies to farmers or certifying foods, and the Chamber will justify this based on its care for the environment and citizens' health. These are guidelines for lawyers who translate them into the language of the bills.

The draft is returned to the Citizens' Chamber, which checks whether its will has been reflected in the bill correctly. Then it is forwarded to the Sejm, where MPs can

prepare proposed amendments to it. The draft is also presented to the public so that amendments may be proposed to the Citizens' Chamber by anyone. This procedure is described in more detail below, but it is worth noting that in the next step, the Senate and the President may submit proposals for amendments, and only after these have been addressed can the Citizens' Chamber vote on adopting the new law.

Certain general principles are needed to make this model of democracy function properly. One of them is the principle of the independence of the Citizens' Chamber from the other two chambers in the Parliament. Another is the principle of the primacy of the Citizens' Chamber's decisions in relation to the decisions of the Sejm or the Senate. In practice, this means that while the Citizens' Chamber may amend laws that have been previously passed by the Sejm, this does not work the other way around. If the Citizens' Chamber adopts a law, amendments can only be introduced through the Citizens' Chamber, except in particular situations which require the consent of the Citizens' Senate (this is another institution supporting the Citizens' Chamber).

Another premise is that the Citizens' Chamber is not a permanent body. It has no term of office. It is a permanent mechanism that is triggered to address a specific case by collecting an appropriate number of citizens' signatures or at the initiative of the Citizens' Senate. Therefore, when a sufficient number of signatures has been collected, a random selection is carried out and the Citizens' Chamber begins its activity. There may be several Citizens' Chambers at the same time dealing with different issues! Each may operate for a little over six months, even a year in special situations, and then its activity ends. Permanent institutions, in turn, include the following: the Citizens' Senate, the Legal Bureau of the Citizens' Chamber, the Standards and Procedures Council and the Centre for Coordinating the Citizens' Chamber (more on those soon).

What do we, as citizens, need the Citizens' Chamber for? It is very simple – to ensure that the voice and will of the society can be translated directly into the law. This chamber is designed as an additional securing mechanism but is nevertheless able to set the direction for the development of the state and settle the most important issues from society's perspective.

OK, but how does it all work, exactly? This is what this text is about.

2. Initiating the Citizens' Chamber

If the Citizens' Chamber is not elected for a term of four or five years, how does it start its activities in practice? When citizens decide that they would like the Citizens' Chamber to deal with a given issue, they have two options – they can collect signatures on a motion to launch it on a given topic or submit their proposals to the Citizens' Senate, which may also do so.

What is the Citizens' Senate? The Citizens' Senate consists of former members of the Citizens' Chamber or former participants of citizens' assemblies – the point here is that these should be people who have personal experience with deliberative democracy. Due to the fact that the Citizens' Senate can make many important decisions, it should be quite large – at least 250 people. The Citizens' Senate's term of office may be one and a half years. Here, too, demographic criteria are taken into account during the random selection, but only two of them – gender and age. There are only two criteria since, owing to the small number of people when the random selection is carried out, it could be very difficult or sometimes simply impossible to perfectly reflect more demographic criteria.
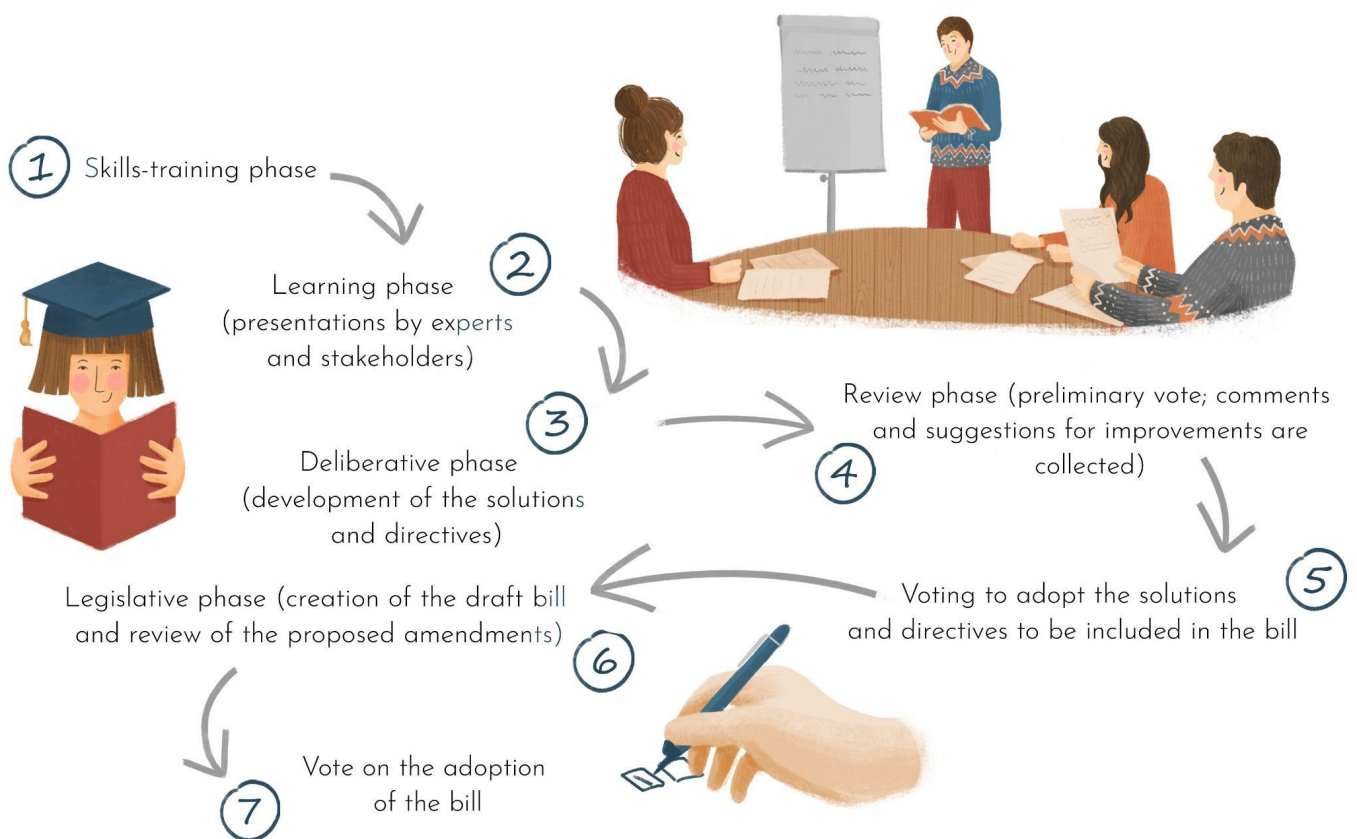
The Citizens' Senate selects topics for the Citizens' Chamber twice a year, in spring and autumn. It can choose up to two topics each time. However, it is not obligatory to select them – the Citizens' Senate may decide that, at a given moment, there is no need to establish a Citizens' Chamber.

The primary way to initiate the operation of the Citizens' Chamber is by collecting signatures of citizens, which can be done in the traditional way, on paper forms, and by submitting verified signatures online. How many signatures are needed? In Poland, at least 100,000 signatures are required to submit a bill to the Sejm on the initiative of citizens, and at least 500,000 signatures are required for a motion for a nationwide referendum. So it seems that a good threshold for initiating the Citizens' Chamber will be at the level of 100–250,000 signatures.

However, before all these signatures are collected and the Citizens' Chamber is convened, something else is required – a proper formulation of the topic. In theory, we could make the assumption that the Citizens' Chamber could deal with any topic under which enough signatures are collected. However, it is clear from experience with citizens' assemblies that not every topic is suitable for a citizens' assembly, an instance of which is the Citizens' Chamber. First of all, scope must be considered – it should

be possible to discuss a given issue in depth during the learning phase so that decisions can be informed and well thought out. This, in turn, is related to time and the number of meetings of the Citizens' Chamber. For example, the topic 'How to save the planet?' may be seem justified; nevertheless, it is enormous. It includes dozens of complex issues and possible solutions, which cannot be sufficiently discussed over several meetings during the learning phase (more on the course of the Citizens' Chamber and its phases is presented below).

COURSE OF THE MEETINGS OF THE CITIZENS' CHAMBER

① Skills-training phase

② Learning phase (presentations by experts and stakeholders)

③ Deliberative phase (development of the solutions and directives)

④ Review phase (preliminary vote; comments and suggestions for improvements are collected)

⑤ Voting to adopt the solutions and directives to be included in the bill

⑥ Legislative phase (creation of the draft bill and review of the proposed amendments)

⑦ Vote on the adoption of the bill

Another important issue is the way the topic is formulated – it should be presented in a clear manner; it should be obvious what precisely the Citizens' Chamber is to deal with, and it cannot indicate or favour any solution. For example, the topic 'What can we do to build small nuclear power plants all over Poland, as the best solutions to climate change?' is a precise topic, but at the same time, it indicates the choice of a specific solution for energy generation. Whereas the topic 'Is nuclear energy good?' is not entirely clear. What does 'good' mean here, from whose perspective? It would be worthwhile to clarify that, rather than summoning the Citizens' Chamber

to resolve it. After all, it can be assumed that if its members met, they would ask at the very beginning – what exactly does it mean?

But why not go the other way and lengthen the learning phase to be able to discuss all the key issues? Because, for example, if the learning phase were to last for two years, the number of people who would be able to participate in such a lengthy process would be lower than if it were only six months. A significant extension of the time needed for the learning phase means that the representativeness of the group decreases. Therefore, it is better to assume that in-person meetings of the learning phase, which involves coming to Warsaw, would be held on four or five weekends. On top of that, additional online meetings can be organised.

Therefore, it should be clear to the initiators from the very beginning what a properly formulated topic proposal for the Citizens' Chamber should look like. Ideally, the following would apply:

1) the scope of the topic makes it possible to present it in the time allocated to the learning phase,
2) the proposal is clearly formulated,
3) respectful language is used,
4) the proposal comes with a description of the problem that is to be solved,
5) the way the topic is formulated is impartial; there is no specific solution indicated.

In general, the topic should concern issues to be included in the provisions of the bills. It may concern both the amendment of an item in an existing bill or the adoption of a whole new bill. 'Ordinary' citizens' assemblies may be organised to resolve other issues. An official guidebook on the entire process can be developed for initiators, describing all the steps involved.

But how can we know that the topic is well-formulated? Is there anyone verifying this? Yes. It's time to introduce another institution supporting the operation of the Citizens' Chamber, namely the Standards and Procedures Council. It comprises five to seven experts on deliberative democracy, selected by the Citizens' Senate every four years.

There are several ways to verify a topic to be resolved by the Citizens' Chamber. The simplest one is that the originator turns to the Standards and Procedures Council before even collecting signatures. The Council members read the idea and either accept or reject it, giving reasons for what needs to be amended. And while the procedure

is very simple, in practice it may pose several challenges. The first one is the number of proposals that can be made in a year. If we assume that anyone can submit an idea for verification, there may be many such submissions. Another thing is that the possibility of a topic proposal being rejected by the Standards and Procedures Council confers great power on this body in practice, so we could use an appeals mechanism.

The slightly more complex procedure is, therefore, as follows: to submit a topic proposal, you need three people who form an initiating group. In order for them to present their idea to the Standards and Procedures Council, 500–1000 signatures are needed to demonstrate that there is broader interest in this proposal. What is worth emphasising here is that the Council does not check whether it likes the idea or not. The Council does not approve the content. The Council only verifies the proposal's compliance with the criteria for topics for the Citizens' Chamber. A topic may only be rejected on the grounds of non-compliance with one of these criteria.

If the topic proposal meets all the criteria, then the Standards and Procedures Council simply gives its approval, and the initiating group can go ahead with collecting the full number of signatures required. If, on the other hand, the Council has concerns, the first step is to meet with members of the initiating group to discuss these concerns. The task of the Council is also to indicate possible solutions and ways to approach the topic correctly. The members of the initiating group can accept these suggestions and revise the proposal, which opens the way for further collection of signatures. But what if they disagree with the Council's suggestions?
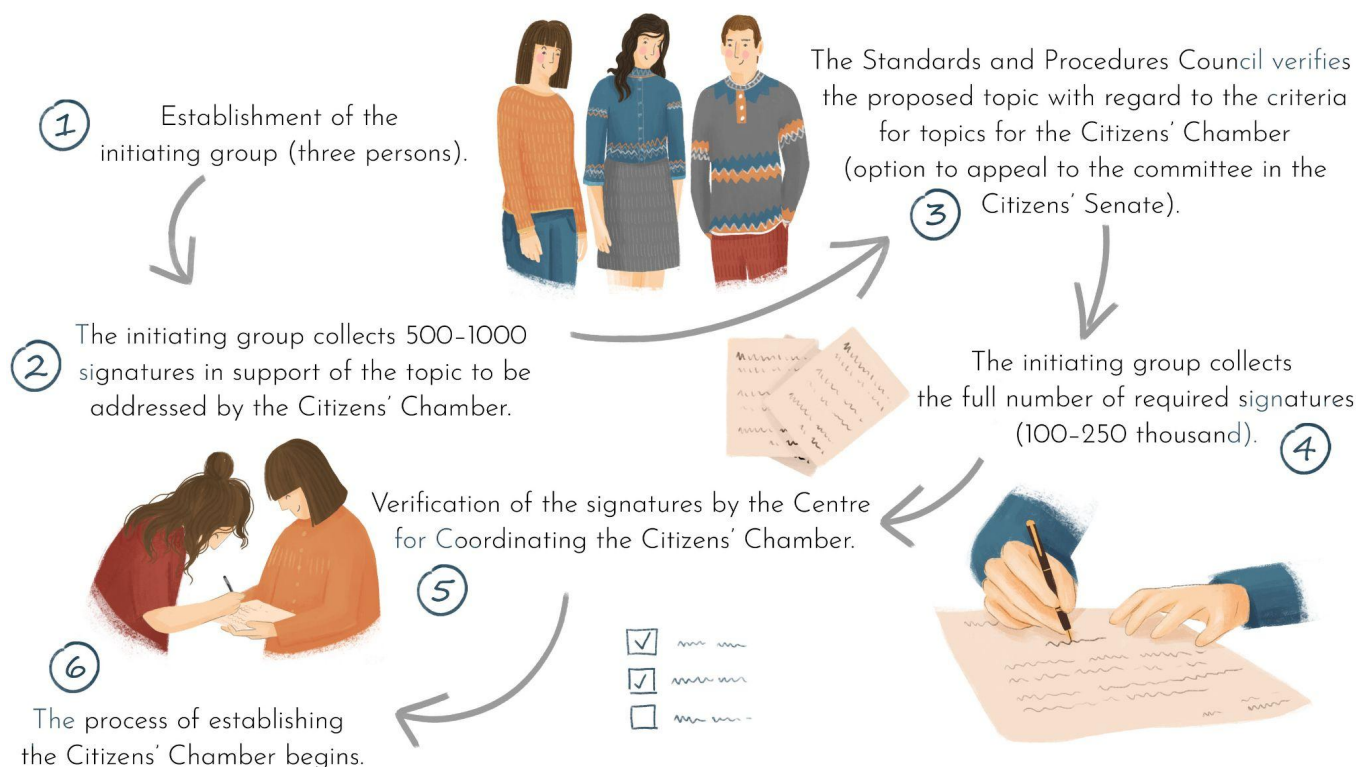
In such a case, the initiating group may appeal to a committee in the Citizens' Senate, which is responsible for the verification of the proposed topics. The Standards and Procedures Council then presents its concerns to the committee, and the initiating group members, in turn, present their perspectives. The committee decides whether the proposal meets the criteria, and its decision is final. For convenience, meetings of this committee may be held over the internet.

It is worth mentioning that if, when designing how the learning phase is to be implemented, it turns out that the topic is still vast and multi-threaded, then the choice of specific issues for discussion may be decided by the Citizens' Chamber itself.

When the initiating group collects the required number of signatures under the proposed topic to be resolved by the Citizens' Chamber, it submits an application with signatures to the Centre for Coordinating the Citizens' Chamber (more on this

below), where the validity of the signatures is verified. If there are enough signatures, then the convening of the Citizens' Chamber may begin. Personal invitations are then sent out to, for example, 50,000 randomly selected adults in Poland, divided into provinces and cities of various sizes and the countryside, taking into account the appropriate proportions. The invitations contain information about the dates of the meetings, the topic and the amount of stipend. Participation in the Citizens' Chamber entails a stipend for each session (meeting) of several hundred zlotys per day. If the meetings start on a Thursday or Friday and continue until the end of the weekend, members of the Chamber are entitled to time off work. Of course, the costs of travel and accommodation are also covered. Furthermore, all members of the Citizens' Chamber are entitled to immunity, just like MPs or senators.

THE INITIATION OF THE CITIZENS' CHAMBER BY THE PEOPLE

1. Establishment of the initiating group (three persons).

2. The initiating group collects 500-1000 signatures in support of the topic to be addressed by the Citizens' Chamber.

3. The Standards and Procedures Council verifies the proposed topic with regard to the criteria for topics for the Citizens' Chamber (option to appeal to the committee in the Citizens' Senate).

4. The initiating group collects the full number of required signatures (100-250 thousand).

5. Verification of the signatures by the Centre for Coordinating the Citizens' Chamber.

6. The process of establishing the Citizens' Chamber begins.

Despite the fact that at the core of the operation of citizens' assemblies is the principle of 'Democracy is for everyone', to ensure the credibility of the process under which the Citizens' Chamber operates, certain restrictions may be introduced as to who may become a member. For example, such an exemption should apply to MPs

and senators; otherwise, we would be dealing with a merger of positions. This directory should also include those who are party to a given case, i.e. members of an NGO that deals with the subject that has been presented to the Citizens' Chamber. This does not mean, however, that people who 'follow' the definition of a party are excluded from the entire process. On the contrary – they are included in it as a party, which will be discussed in a moment.

Participation in the Citizens' Chamber is voluntary, so the final draw is carried out only among those who have expressed their willingness to become members of the Chamber and have registered to participate (via the internet or by phone) after receiving the invitation. Substitute members are also randomly selected at the same time (for example, five percent of the total number), and they participate in the meetings just like everyone else. Thanks to this, if someone quits, a person from the reserve group can be immediately appointed in their place.

3. The course of the meetings of the Citizens' Chamber

The way the meetings of the Citizens' Chamber are organised, and the course of these meetings, differ significantly from the way the Sejm or Senate operates. In a deliberative democracy, the randomly selected persons are like jurors in court or arbitrators who decide what is most beneficial from the perspective of the good of society. They represent society by considering several demographic or social criteria, which ensures a variety of standpoints. It is the nation in a nutshell, not the representative of one. This difference may seem subtle, but it nevertheless affects how we look at the Chamber's activities. Members of the Citizens' Chamber are not bound by voters' instructions or political parties. There is no such thing as party discipline in the Citizens' Chamber. The final votes are secret, rather than open, to allow being completely honest in one's decisions and in harmony with oneself.

500 people is a large group. It is intentionally larger than the number of MPs in the Sejm, which is to ensure that its decisions are trustworthy. Wouldn't it be easier to organise meetings for a smaller group, for example, of 100 people? Of course, it would be easier, but the priority here is credibility – it is a group tasked with creating laws that will apply throughout the country, and it is vital to ensure that citizens have confidence in its decisions. On the other hand, experience in organising deliberative

processes shows that it is indeed possible to conduct the deliberative phase with large groups. An example is the World Café process, in which participants talk in small groups at tables, and after a while, they make a change and move on to the next table. Such conversations can involve up to 2,000 people.

The first meetings of the Citizens' Chamber are, however, a skills-training phase. This involves getting acquainted with one's role in the Chamber, with the course of the whole process. This can be arranged in such a way that, to gain experience of being a member of the Chamber, a 'simulated', simplified process of creating directives for the bill is carried out (on a different topic than the one that will be considered later) in order to gain experience and better understand the role of a member of the Chamber. Only after this part does the learning about the actual topic begin.

Another difference is that the Citizens' Chamber does not have a marshal or chairperson. All its meetings are organised by the Centre for Coordinating the Citizens' Chamber. Its director is appointed by the Citizens' Senate for a four-year term. The role of the director of the Centre is to organise teams of coordinators who will prepare the meetings of the Chamber and employ facilitators – people to conduct discussions during the meetings. Preparing the decision-making process for the Citizens' Chamber requires skill and knowledge of the methods and exercises that facilitate decision-making. Therefore, it makes sense that specialists should be employed to take care of it. Facilitators can, of course, only be people who are neutral in a given topic. It is not their role to guide the members of the Chamber to any specific solutions but to help them have clarity about what they want themselves.

This structure – the way the Chamber's operation is organised – requires control mechanisms to ensure that, for example, facilitators do not favour a solution or that experts have the opportunity to present different points of view. This is solved in such a way that two monitoring teams are appointed for each topic dealt with by the Citizens' Chamber. The first of them checks compliance with procedures and standards, and the second – the correctness of the agenda in the learning phase. Their detailed method of operation is set out in the Rules of the Citizens' Chamber, which provides that arbitration is possible in the event of a dispute between the coordinating team and the monitoring team. For example, if the issue in dispute relates to a possible breach of a standard, then the Standards and Procedures Council will be the arbitrator and make the final decision.

SUPPORT INSTITUTIONS

CITIZENS' SENATE

• May choose up to two topics for the Citizens' Chamber

• Selects the director of the Centre for Coordinating the Citizens' Chamber, members of the Standards and Procedures Council and the director of the Legal Bureau

• Adopts standards and the rulebook for the Citizens' Chamber

• Decides on issues related to the correctness of topics proposed for the Citizens' Chamber

• Gives approval to the Sejm to introduce changes in the laws adopted by the Citizens' Chamber

LEGAL BUREAU

• Creates draft bills

• Supports members of the Citizens' Chamber in adopting the bills in accordance with the rules of legal drafting

STANDARDS AND PROCEDURES COUNCIL

• Verifies the correctness of topics proposed for the Citizens' Chamber

• Co-creates the draft rulebook for the Citizens' Chamber and offers proposals for standards

• Acts as an arbiter in the case of disputes between the coordinating team and monitoring team

CENTRE FOR COORDINATING THE CITIZENS' CHAMBER

• Creates a program and runs the meetings of the Citizens' Chamber

• Conducts the random selection of members of the Citizens' Chamber

• Selects and hires facilitators

• Co-creates the draft rulebook for the Citizens' Chamber and offers proposals for standards

• Runs the secretariat of the Citizens' Chamber

Back to the learning phase, however. Where do the meeting agenda and the list of experts come from? This is what the coordinating team appointed by the director of the Centre for Coordinating the Citizens' Chamber deals with. The role of this team is to identify experts and stakeholders that are interested in a given topic. Stakeholders may be ministries, public offices, research institutions, NGOs or informal groups whose activity relates to the subject of the Citizens' Chamber. The stakeholders may present their position to the Chamber in writing or in person, upon the Chamber's invitation. The coordinating team draws up a list of stakeholders that are interested in having a presentation in person, and from this list, within the speaking time of the stakeholders, members of the Citizens' Chamber select the stakeholders to the meeting by voting. If either party cannot speak in person, they may present their suggestions in writing or in a video recording.

On the other hand, the program of expert speeches is arranged in such a way that first, in consultation with experts, a list of issues that should be discussed (such as the school curriculum, if such a comparison can be used) is created, and experts are selected who will be best able to present the topic. Expert speeches are usually short, lasting 12–20 minutes so that they can be easily absorbed by those who are not specialists in a given field. Of course, time is also provided to ask questions, which may be many. In addition to weekend meetings, additional online meetings are also possible to ensure that the fullest possible knowledge is provided to the Chamber. Longer recordings of expert presentations can also be provided.

Importantly, both experts and stakeholders can present not only knowledge for a good understanding of a given issue, but also proposals for solutions that members of the Chamber can use when creating directives for the bill.

When it comes to ensuring the proper course of the entire process, it is worth mentioning here that the Citizens' Chamber may decide to dismiss a team of coordinators or facilitators if they are not satisfied with their results. The director of the Centre for Coordinating the Citizens' Chamber may, however, be dismissed by the Citizens' Senate. These mechanisms are designed so that the public has control over the entire process.

This also applies to the standards and detailed rulebook for the operation of the Citizens' Chamber. While the draft list of standards is prepared by the Centre for Coordinating the Citizens' Chamber together with the Standards and Procedures Council, it is adopted by the Citizens' Senate. On the other hand, changes to the rulebook of the Chamber may be introduced by the Centre, which prepares the course of the entire process, but with the approval of the Standards and Procedures Council and with the possibility of appealing to the Citizens' Senate, which has the final say.

Of course, the learning phase is not everything – when it ends, the deliberative phase begins, during which directives for the bill are developed. While the learning phase is broadcast live, and the recordings of expert speeches and all materials provided to the Chamber are published on the website, the deliberative phase is closed to the media, and its proper course is supervised by a monitoring team. The point here is to provide the members of the Chamber with the comfort of a free and honest discussion.

As part of the deliberative phase, the members of the Chamber first discuss the general goals they would like to achieve; they create a clear vision of what they

believe an ideal state would be. Then, they consider and discuss which detailed solutions would help achieve this, and finally they vote on the preliminary list of directives for the bill. This list is published on the internet for anyone to submit their comments, and it is also sent for consultation by experts and stakeholders – this is part of the review phase. Once the comments and suggestions have been addressed by the Chamber, a vote is held on the final adoption of the directives for the bill.

Voting takes place by assessing each proposal on the following scale:

1) I strongly agree,

2) I agree,

3) I agree, although I have some doubts or reservations,

4) I have many doubts,

5) I somewhat disagree,

6) I disagree,

7) I strongly disagree.

The first three options express support for the proposal, while the others express no support. In order for the voting result to be as precise as possible, not only the percentage of support (what percentage of people chose options 1–3) is checked, but also the strength of said support. For if the vast majority of the Chamber indicated a third option regarding a proposal (I agree, although I have some doubts or reservations), it can be assumed that the majority agree with it, but this support would be weak since it is associated with doubts or reservations. Things are different when everyone chooses the first option, which is 'I strongly agree' – then the situation is clear. Therefore, options 1–3 are scored as follows:

1) I strongly agree – three points,

2) I agree – two points,

3) I agree, although I have some doubts – one point.

Then we can calculate the arithmetic mean for these points, and if it is at least 1.75, i.e. only a small part of the Chamber has doubts (if everyone votes simply 'I agree', the average is two), then it can be considered that support is sufficiently strong.

On the other hand, what majority of votes should the Chamber's decisions be based on? To be able to clearly state that a given proposal enjoys the support of the members of the Chamber, support for it should be at the level of 70–80 percent. This approach is different from that of the Sejm and Senate, where in most cases, a simple majority is sufficient, and only one vote in favour more than against is enough

to adopt a bill. However, a slim majority may indicate strong divisions, and if our goal is a harmoniously functioning society, then it would be better if this threshold were higher. It is worth emphasising that since the Citizens' Chamber functions differently from the Sejm or Senate, achieving such a high level of agreement is much easier. This is possible because, among other things, there is no party competition in the Citizens' Chamber and no thinking in terms of running an election campaign, which is ensured because members are selected at random.

While this method of voting at scale may seem a bit complicated at first glance, in practice, it is very easy to use and, in fact, appealing. One proposal passes after another on the ballot paper, and you check whether you agree with it or not, and to what extent. This method has been used many times as part of citizens' assemblies, and precise results can be obtained by it.

4. Drafting a bill

The Citizens' Chamber not only adopts the directives for a bill, but it also states the values it followed and publishes a justification for its decision. This package of guidelines is submitted to the Legal Bureau of the Citizens' Chamber, where people specialising in writing legal regulations translate them into a draft law written in legalese. The director of the Legal Bureau is elected by the Citizens' Senate for a four-year term. It is their role to create and coordinate a team of lawyers who will be able to cooperate with the Citizens' Chamber efficiently. It is worth involving the lawyers in the entire process from the very beginning so that they can listen to the sessions of the Chamber and understand as much as possible the expectations of the members of the Chamber regarding legal regulations on a given topic.

Having been prepared by the Legal Bureau, the bill goes back to the Citizens' Chamber, where it is discussed and refined. This is the first reading of the bill. While the draft is being written, it may turn out that there are some ambiguities or gaps, and it is up to the Citizens' Chamber to resolve them. When its members decide that everything is ready, the bill is published on the website so that any interested person can send their suggestions and remarks, and it is also forwarded to the Sejm, to all MPs.

MPs may submit so-called 'team amendments', which means that each such amendment must be signed by at least 15 people. Such an amendment is subject

to a vote by the Citizens' Chamber, which may adopt it by a majority of 70–80 percent of votes. If the required majority is not achieved, the amendment is considered rejected. Citizens may also submit team amendments after collecting an appropriate number of signatures – for example, several thousand. Additionally, all citizens and MPs may also submit their own proposals and comments individually; however, they are not subject to a vote (due to their potentially very large number). Of course, this possibility is also available to NGOs, public offices and ministries. In a situation where there are a lot of these individual proposals, the Citizens' Chamber may decide to appoint a person to review them and draw up the very essence of them, indicating the most important issues that have emerged. Of course, all these proposals are also fully available to members of the Chamber and are published on the website.

At this stage, the Citizens' Chamber may also decide to appoint its own spokesperson. This would be a person from outside the group who would represent the Chamber's position in the media and explain what is behind the solutions included in the bill and what the members of the Chamber were guided by when adopting them. It is good practice for members of the Chamber to avoid solo media appearances until the bill is passed so as not to create the impression that one person's perspective is the voice of the entire Chamber. The role of the spokesperson, on the other hand, is to present the different perspectives that have emerged during the discussion as well as what has been adopted by the entire Chamber.
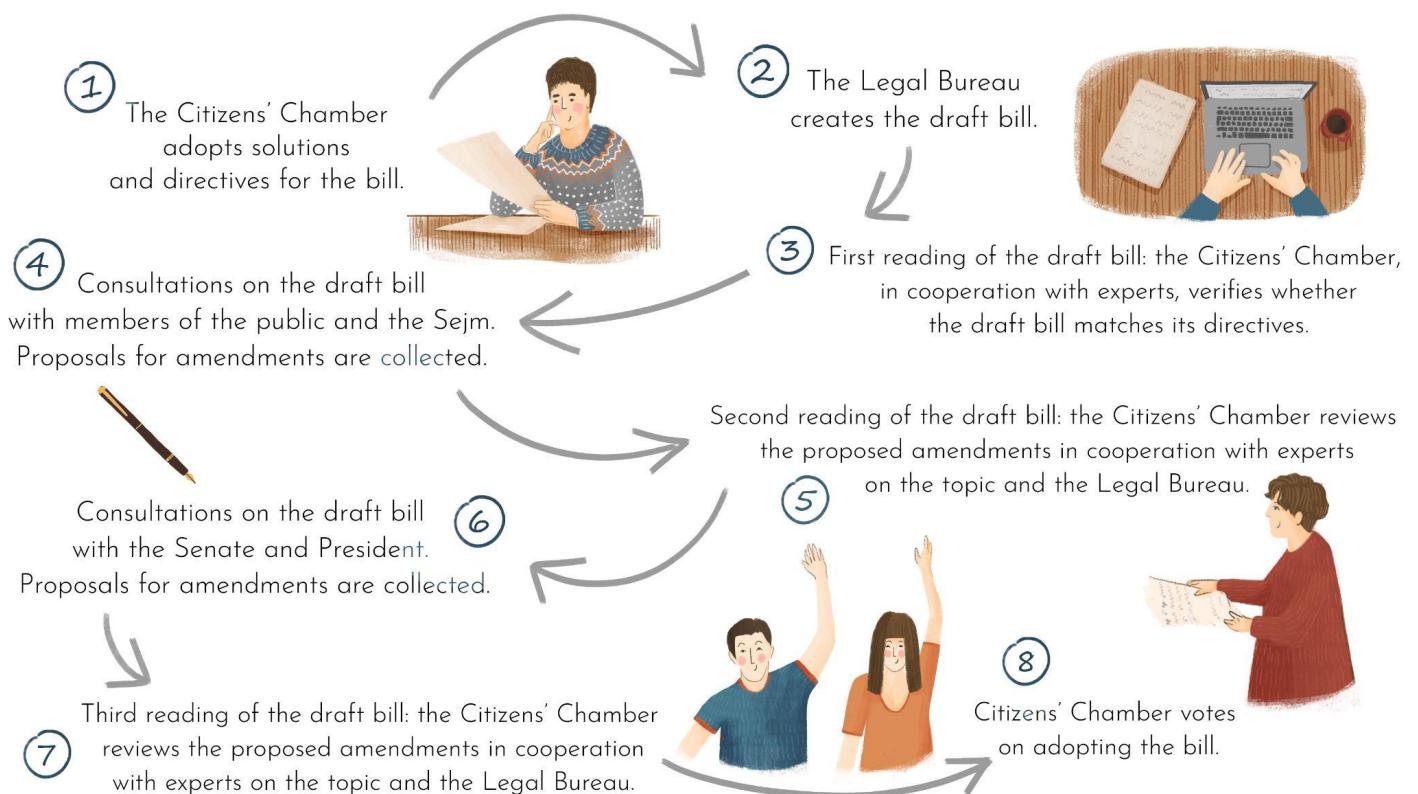
Unlike the Sejm or Senate, the identities of the members of the Chamber are protected to reduce the likelihood of pressure being exerted on them. The essential principle here is that members of the Chamber may not be contacted directly to discuss the issues related to the subject of its deliberations outside of the meetings of the Citizens' Chamber. Violation of this principle may result in removal from the Chamber – the decision on this issue is taken by the Citizens' Senate, after consulting the Standards and Procedures Council. All proposals and positions on the topic dealt with by the Chamber are sent through the official channel to the coordinating team, which forwards them to all members of the Chamber and publishes them on the website.

When members of the Chamber wish to consult experts or representatives of the stakeholders, they also have the opportunity to send their questions through the coordinating team. And answers to these questions are forwarded to all members of the Chamber and published. The point here is to ensure the transparency

of the process on the one hand, and on the other, to enable the public to examine the grounds upon which the Citizens' Chamber has made its decisions – anyone can read the comments from the experts or the positions of the stakeholders.

Once all the proposed amendments and comments have been collected, the Citizens' Chamber meets again to consider them. While doing so, it may consult with experts of its choosing. This is the second reading of the bill. In the next step, the updated version of the bill (if any changes were made) is forwarded to the Senate and the President. Here, too, senators have the opportunity to submit team amendments, which require the support of at least 15 senators and are subject to voting. The President has a special right to propose individual amendments that are subject to a vote. When the proposed amendments have been collected at this stage, the Citizens' Chamber meets again to consider them. This is the third reading of the draft bill, and here also, the Chamber can be aided by invited experts presenting their position on whether individual proposed amendments are worth adopting.

THE CREATION OF BILLS
BY THE CITIZENS' CHAMBER — LEGISLATIVE PHASE

1. The Citizens' Chamber adopts solutions and directives for the bill.

2. The Legal Bureau creates the draft bill.

3. First reading of the draft bill: the Citizens' Chamber, in cooperation with experts, verifies whether the draft bill matches its directives.

4. Consultations on the draft bill with members of the public and the Sejm. Proposals for amendments are collected.

5. Second reading of the draft bill: the Citizens' Chamber reviews the proposed amendments in cooperation with experts on the topic and the Legal Bureau.

6. Consultations on the draft bill with the Senate and President. Proposals for amendments are collected.

7. Third reading of the draft bill: the Citizens' Chamber reviews the proposed amendments in cooperation with experts on the topic and the Legal Bureau.

8. Citizens' Chamber votes on adopting the bill.

Once the Citizens' Chamber has considered all the amendments, the bill is put to the vote. Support at the level of 70–80 percent is required to adopt it. The adopted bill enters into force in accordance with the date specified therein and becomes applicable law. The President's signature is not required for this procedure. Nevertheless, as in the case of other laws, it is possible to refer the bill to the Constitutional Court in order to verify its compliance with the Constitution.

In order to avoid a situation where a bill passed by the Citizens' Chamber is immediately afterwards sent to the Sejm, which might change it as it sees fit, the principle of primacy of acts created by the Citizens' Chamber is adopted. This means that amendments can only be introduced by another Citizens' Chamber, except in special situations, when, for example, an amendment is urgently needed (say, as a result of a natural disaster). Then the Sejm may apply to the Citizens' Senate for consent to make corrections. It should also indicate what kind of amendments are intended so that the Citizens' Senate can make an informed decision on this matter. Thanks to all of this, we have a robust democratic mechanism that puts the power in the hands of society.

There is one more thing to consider in this whole process – celebration. If the final voting session of the Citizens' Chamber takes place in person, then a good idea would be to provide cake, for instance. The point is that democracy can be fun. The main goal, of course, is to make high-quality decisions. Nevertheless, how these decisions are achieved is just as important. I realise that the image of happy people eating cake is not something most of us are used to when thinking about Parliament. However, it may be so.

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