THE HUNGARIAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
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DEAR READER,

“House of the Nation”, Parliament Building has been the home of popular representation, the Hungarian legislature for over a century. Over this period, it has become the symbolic home of all Hungarian citizens as well as Hungarian living all over the world. She does not show her age, although she has lived through a century of tragedies, turmoil and tribulations, glorious and sad moments, and times when she herself often sustained injuries.

The idea of constructing a Parliament Building was conceived in a period when the Hungarian nation experienced an upward phase of development. Having an eye on the London Houses of Parliament, Prime Minister Gyula Andrássy envisioned a new, permanent, as it was called at the time, building for the Hungarian National Assembly. The Gothic Revival style of architecture was considered Germanic and had many opponents but the Prime Minister’s support was one of the factors in favour of architect Imre Steindl’s plans. According to the intent of the architect as well as the designers and artists involved, the magnificent building reflected the strength and confidence of the Hungarians of the period. The new building was also an expression of pride and self-identity of the Hungarian legislation, which had held its sessions at various locations over the course of history. “The building should be of a simple structure and appearance, but one that is the right and proper due of a free constitutional nation’s dignity,” states an old Parliament document.

It was from the balcony of Parliament Building that the Hungarian republic was proclaimed on 23 October 1989. Since the spring of 1990 the building has housed the democratically elected National Assembly. Today, we are working towards the same goal: to make the House of the Nation home for every Hungarian citizen. May this House and the work within her walls be an expression of the dignity of a sovereign state and its citizens.

When we offer a glimpse into the past and present of the Hungarian National Assembly through this book, I hope that all readers will feel at home in the House of the Nation.

Budapest, October 2006
## I. Hungary’s Parliament.
### One Hundred and Fifty Years of Eminence

- The Evolution of a Modern Parliament
- Parliament Between the Two World Wars
- The Rise and Fall of Representative Parliament
- The Illusion of Parliament in a One-Party Regime

## II. Functions, Organization and Activities of the National Assembly

1. Election of the Members of Parliament
2. The Organization of the National Assembly
   - The Constitution of Parliament
   - Officers of the National Assembly
   - The House Committee
   - Committees
   - Parliamentary groups of the parties in Parliament
   - Members of Parliament
   - The Office of the National Assembly
3. Responsibilities of the National Assembly
   - Legislation
   - Supervising the work of the Government
   - The Supervisory Agencies of the National Assembly
4. Operation of the National Assembly
   - Public access to the work of the National Assembly

## III. Parliament Building

- Design and Construction
- The Exterior of the Building
- Inside the Building
Speaker’s rostrum in the legislative chamber of Parliament Building
After the era of feudal diets the foundations of parliamentarism were laid by Acts IV and V of 1848, which provided for the creation and operation of a representative Parliament. Act IV provided that the National Assembly should hold annual sessions in Pest and the laws it enacted should be confirmed by royal assent one by one. Act V provided for representative elections, which meant that Members were elected by popular votes in constituencies rather than delegated by the counties. The constituencies were delineated by the Act, taking into consideration population, area and economy. Voting in the 1848 and 1865 parliamentary elections and well as the thirteen elections held during the period of the dual monarchy from 1867 to 1918 were by open ballot in constituencies. Voting rights, which barely changed during the period (apart from a minor amendment in 1874), were based on wealth, education and local residence, and excluded women until 1918.

Parliament was convened and dissolved, and sessions closed by the monarch, who exercised this right upon the Government’s (the Prime Minister’s) initiative.

With the exception of a summer and a winter recess, the National Assembly was in session all year round. This put an end to the monarch’s prerogative of convening the legislature only at times he deemed necessary. From 1867 to 1887 parliamentary terms of office ran for three years, after this, they were extended to five years. Terms tended to be shorter – for example in 1906 the monarch dissolved Parliament that had been constituted in 1905 – but the 1910–1915 term was extended to last until November 1918 because of World War I. Terms were divided into annual sessions. The most senior Member prepared, opened and chaired
the constituent sitting (hence the term Chair of Age). From 1848 the House elected its officers: the Speaker, the two Deputy Speakers and the notaries, who performed their duties in accordance with the Standing Orders (or House Rules) of Parliament in effect. The Standing Orders are a collection of the internal, organizational and operational rules of Parliament. Legislated in 1848, the first Standing Orders provided for the credentials of Members, the constitution of the House, the order of proceedings, the submission and processing of petitions, the election and competence of officers, and public participation at sittings. The Standing Orders were amended several times (the main points of debate were expansion of the Speaker’s sphere of competence, restriction or expansion of the rights of the opposition, freedom of speech, and parliamentary discipline).

The 1848–1849 Parliament’s main task was to create, then protect, the public law framework and conditions for a bourgeois transformation. While it attempted to step further along the path of social, legal and institutional reforms, legislative work was hampered by the antagonism with the Habsburgs. Forced into a war of self-defence, the National Assembly stayed together, despite its unlawful dissolution, until 11 August 1849 to ensure the legality of the fights.

Emperor Francis Joseph did not convene Parliament for twelve years after the defeat of the War of Independence. It was not until 1860 when the National Assembly was again convened by virtue of the October Diploma, a short-lived Constitution for the Habsburg Empire suspending absolutism. The 1861 Parliament made an attempt to settle Hungary’s relationship with the monarch but the Habsburg Court was not inclined to accept the demands of the Hungarian nation offered in the compromise submitted by Ferenc Deák. The historical significance of the next, 1865–1868 session
of Parliament was marked by the preparation, codification and enactment of the Compromise acts, which led to agreement with the monarch and the formation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary. The new Empire had no central Parliament. Defence, foreign affairs and related finances, i.e. the so-called common affairs were ultimately the monarch’s competence but matters concerning the Empire as a whole were governed and managed by a joint Council of Ministers. Committees delegated by the two Parliaments approved the joint budget. However, both Parliaments had to approve the decisions of the delegates before the budget could be adopted as law.

The House of Representatives of the bicameral Parliament consisted of 413 directly elected representatives (this number included Transylvanian Members, and from 1868, also Croatian Members). In 1848 the House of Lords included every aristocrat by birth that were of age, as well as the Catholic bishops and the county governors appointed by the Government. The reform of this cumbersome and huge body of 834 took decades and was finally implemented by Prime Minister Kálmán Tisza in 1885. Under Act VII of 1885 each established Church could delegate representatives, and heads of the Supreme Court, the Budapest High Court of Justice and the Administrative Court also became members of the Upper House. The number of appointed delegates was reduced to 50, and the House of Lords elected another 50 representatives from among the non-delegated aristocrats, who held their seat for life once they had been approved by the monarch upon the proposal of the Council of Ministers. County governors and aristocrats who did not possess the wealth required by law were no longer granted a seat. While the number of seats in the House of Lords was reduced the dominance of the aristocracy did not disappear. The Speaker and the two Deputy Speakers of the
House of Lords were appointed by the monarch for each parliamentary term.

Supreme power was held jointly by Parliament and the monarch. Parliament held the classic function of legislation. The Lower House, the House of Representatives was definitely the more powerful of the two Houses, for only it had the right to initiate legislation. The Government submitted bills to the House of Representatives, which in turn debated, passed, rejected or amended and supplemented them. However, an affirmative vote from the House of Lords was also necessary before a law could be passed. In 1848 and later (in the entire period between 1867 and 1918) the Upper House had the right to reject or amend Lower House legislation any number of times. In other words, the pre-1848 co-decision requirement prevailed. Once a bill was passed by both Houses it became a statute of Parliament and was submitted to the monarch by the prime minister. Statutes became laws if sanctioned by the monarch.

The internal structure of the House of Representatives reflected the principle that representation was individualized and not connected to political parties. Initially, Members were classified into nine debate classes by drawing of lots. The classes prepared the materials for plenary and developed an opinion on the bills after in-depth debate. Although the debate-class system meant that every Member was included in the codification process, the procedure was exceedingly laborious and bureaucratic, and entirely lacked professionalism. Specialized committees were first established in 1865 to prepare and express an opinion on laws of major importance (railway law, education law, etc.). The first standing committee, the Committee on Finance was established in 1867 offering an opinion to the House of Representatives in all financial matters.
The 1874 Standing Orders created 11 specialized standing committees, which meant that from this time on the standing committees were equally involved in the debate on bills. By the end of the 19th century the former debate class system was entirely replaced by standing committees.

Parliament’s duties included supervision of the operation of the executive, i.e. the Government. If the House so required, ministers had to appear at sittings. Members could ask questions regarding government matters and the competent minister had to answer on the spot or not later than within 30 days. Prime Ministers tended to appear before the House even when not specifically requested and informed the Members on events. Members had the freedom of speech and the right to immunity. They could address interpellations to ministers and make motions (independent or amendment motions) and proposals. Although it was not until 1875 that the first law on incompatibility was adopted, a resolution was passed in 1867 whereby representatives were not allowed to hold government offices while Parliament was in session.

The most important government supervisory functions were the adoption of the budget for the following year and approval of the final account of the previous year. By approving the budget, the National Assembly assessed the necessity and magnitude of the proposed Government spending, and the final account settlement checked the result of finances against budgetary provisions.

Until 1899 the House of Representative also undertook the task of ruling on election matters, when part of this function was transferred to the Supreme Court.

Around the time of the Compromise (of 1867) there were three parties in Parliament in Hungary, the main political dividing line between them being their views on Hungary’s relationship with Austria. (At the time, parties essentially meant parliamentary
groups of Members.) Proponent and creator of the Compromise, the party led by Ferenc Deák naturally accepted the current status quo. The Centre Left opposition headed by Kálmán Tisza was at the time critical of the way in which common affairs of the Empire were managed. The Ultra Left, which encompassed smallholders with the right to suffrage engaged in politics and the intelligentsia holding on to the achievements of the 1848 Revolution, rejected dualism. It was not long before the Deák Party and the Centre Left were merged. The ruling party was aiming to win over the loyal opposition; on the other hand, the desire of Centre Left leaders to have a share in the political power was becoming stronger. The merger took place in the spring of 1875, giving rise to Kálmán Tisza as Prime Minister and the thirty-year rule of the Liberal Party. Following the signs of crisis of the Compromise (mainly at the turn of the century) numerous groups detached themselves from the ruling party as a result of societal interest, constitutional debates and dissent. A few ideology-based parties were also established in the last quarter of the 19th century: the Anti-Semite Party, the People’s Party and the Social Democratic Party, the last of which did not make it to Parliament until 1918.

From 1848 the National Assembly was seated in Pest. The House of Representatives had their sessions in the Redoute building, and the House of Lords, in the National Museum. As the War of Independence broke out, Parliament had been forced to move first to Debrecen in the northeast, then to Szeged in the south and on to Arad in Transylvania. In 1861 the Lower House assembled in the National Museum and the House of Lords assembled in the building of the Pest Guild of Commerce. Designed by Miklós Ybl, the provisional building of the House of Representatives in Sándor Street was commissioned in 1865, and the House of Lords moved to the building of the National Museum. In 1880 a law was passed
to build a permanent building for Parliament. Work started in 1885 and the building designed by architect Imre Steindl had been fully completed by 1904. The House of Representatives assembled for the first time in the new Parliament building on 8 October 1902 and the House of Lords had its first sitting on 22 December 1902.

In the era of dualism the Hungarian Parliament functioned on an ongoing basis. It operated an essentially liberal social system, supervised the Government and ensured relative political publicity. As a result the monarch made only one attempt, in 1905, at authoritarian legislation by decree. In 1868 Parliament resumed the legislative modernization process that had been interrupted in 1849. Up until the 1880s the main tasks of the legislature were to create and regulate the conditions for, as well as the legal and institutional framework of, a modern state and a capitalist economy and civil society. From the 1880s major codification endeavours came to a halt and only lesser or greater amendments were made to the already existing system. By the end of the period, modernization of the parliamentary system and the introduction of universal suffrage were around the corner. Their implementation was derailed because of World War I and the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

PARLIAMENT BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS
1918-1944

In October 1918, at the end of World War I, revolution broke out in Budapest with the military collapse of the Central Powers, which included the Austro-Hungarian Empire. As a sign of the break-up of the former state, soldiers replaced the rosettes on their uniform hats with chrysanthemums, thus the democratic revolution was dubbed the “Chrysanthemum Revolution.”
A number of nations came into being on the territory of what had been the Habsburg Empire, including the independent country of Hungary. The country was proclaimed a republic in November 1918. Parliament voted to dissolve itself and for the next few months the revolutionary government issued all significant statutes, which were called “people’s laws.” These laws included freedom of the press, freedom of assembly and of association, the right to self-determination for the ethnic minorities living in Hungary, a land reform, and universal suffrage to include voting rights for women as well as the secret ballot. However, no elections were held under the new law because demands being made on the country by its neighbours and the Entente Powers to cede territory, triggered a takeover by the Communists and the Socialists, who were allied with them. The ensuing Republic of Councils also established its legislative power on the basis of universal suffrage and the secret ballot (though it did deprive a good portion of property owners of their right to vote). The National Assembly of Councils that took the place of Parliament, however, operated on completely different principles than traditional Parliaments. The Republic of Councils suffered military defeat after 133 days in power and yet another political system was established. This one emphasized its continuity with the era prior to defeat in the world war as well as its differences, its newness.

Parliament in an independent Hungary was convened as a unicameral National Assembly, chosen through universal suffrage that included women, and by secret ballot. But tension was high. Despite the democratic ballot, the real world was dominated by military detachments. Responding to this, the Social Democrats, though they had been granted a minister’s post in the government established at the end of 1919, chose to boycott the elections.

Although the National Assembly established by decree had
been intended as a temporary institution, it remained in operation until the mid-1920s, when a bicameral legislature was re-introduced.

Universal suffrage and the secret ballot proved temporary. In the years to come, a series of decrees and laws tightened the limits on suffrage. As a point of interest, the rules covering suffrage in 1922 were adopted by a constitutional conference convened for that particular purpose, and not by the National Assembly. Universal suffrage and the secret ballot were not re-introduced to Hungary until 1939.

Regulations adopted in the 1920s and 1930s set up a distinction between rural and urban constituencies. Open balloting (which the executive power could oversee) was required in the rural regions while the secret ballot was used in urban areas. The general system of one Member per specific constituency was altered. Instead, in Budapest and other cities votes were cast for lists of Members submitted by various political parties, which tells us that between the two world wars representation operated on party principles.

The composition of the Upper House, established in 1927, was different from that of the former House of Lords. It allowed the traditional aristocracy, regional governments, and certain professional orders to have joint and simultaneous representation. Its authority was curtailed, allowing it only two rejections of House of Representatives’ decisions. As in the era of dualism, its role was subordinate to that of the Lower House.

Defeat in World War I and the collapse of the Habsburg Empire resulted in some alterations in the form of state. Officially, the country remained a monarchy. However, the chief executive was no longer a king but a regent who had less authority than a monarch. Regent Miklós Horthy, backed by military pressure,
had been elected by the National Assembly in 1920. Horthy had the right to one rejection of a law passed by Parliament until 1937, when the rejection right was increased to two. However, under common law, he was consulted on all bills submitted by the executive (this was similar to the monarch’s right to prior approval that had existed in the dualist era), avoiding the risk of public conflict. Cabinets were responsible to both Parliament and the regent, who was granted this royal prerogative.

The Lower House operated in much the same way as it had prior to 1918, with the term of office increased to five years as of the mid-1920s. Initially, the Standing Orders remained lax — restrictions introduced in 1913 to put a stop to obstructionism were not re-introduced. However, as of 1924, time limits were put on debates, reflecting partisan politics.

The political demarcation line in Parliament was essentially the positions espoused by the 19th century liberals and socialists against the neo-conservative – anti-liberal forces. The latter called themselves the Christian National camp. Both sides had multiple sub-groups. The political system tended to be right of centre. In the 1920s it was still able to mesh with executive power, through which it was able to neutralize the right-wing radicals who had gained power during the revolution. By the late 1930s it was no longer able to do so. Laws passed at this time reflected the demands of the right-wing radicals, who called themselves the Arrow Cross movement, partly because of the country became allied with Hitler’s Third Reich. Political parties organized themselves around interest advocacy and world outlook to a far greater extent than they had prior to the world war. Nevertheless, issues of common law such as whether to be a republic or a monarchy, and if the latter, to have a chosen monarch or to declare legitimism (the right of the Habsburgs to the Hungarian throne), continued to
wend their way through Hungarian politics well after the abolition of the House of Habsburg in 1921.

Many of the political issues dominating the entire period between the two world wars were connected to the Versailles Peace Treaties ending World War I. Having been forced to cede a considerable part of its territory, the country had to reorganize its public administration system, a system that also needed to be updated to conform to the 20th century, that is, more etatist. Social problems became increasingly acute and some attempts were made to resolve them through a limited land reform. Interestingly enough, the system treated the “Jewish Question” as a social problem, too. Early in its rule it passed laws known as the *numerus clausus* laws, which set the proportions of the various religious groups that could be admitted to university, while later it passed “Jewish Laws” that deprived this group of some and, still later, all of its civil rights.

The issue of political liberties, including suffrage, was a dominant one throughout the era. It was repeatedly put on Parliament’s political agenda, and debated much more heatedly than in the era of dualism. The reason, of course, was that by this time Hungarian laws were significantly behind those of modern Europe. Rule by authority, principally in the rural regions, where a gendarmerie had a powerful presence, was diametrically opposed to the Western European norms of the period.

Parliament’s legislative activity was more intense than it had been prior to the war although the number of government decrees issued each year grew much more rapidly than the number of laws passed by the legislature.

When the Versailles Treaties were “revised” with the assistance of Hitler’s army, which returned territories to its ally, Hungary, starting in 1938, invited “representatives” of these territories to sit in Parliament, increasing the number of Members.
Towards the end of World War II, at the end of 1944 and beginning of 1945, Hungary was split down the middle regarding its institutions of government – actually having two of everything. The Arrow Cross government of Ferenc Szálasi, who proclaimed loyalty to Hitler to the end, the remnants of the old Parliament, and the executive and judicial bodies of that administration were one group. In the final days of 1944, they became mobile, gradually travelling to the western corners of the country to avoid the advancing front. By early 1945, they had moved past Hitler’s retreating army into Austria, a still-occupied region of the Third Reich. With them went faculties and students of universities and guards and detainees of prisons. One might say that these organs of state power simply abandoned the country.

This move was partly responsible for the beginnings of a new system of government institutions in the largest city of eastern Hungary, Debrecen. The Soviet forces that had taken the region assisted the shift to the new system and to an extent it was modelled on a Polish system called the “Lublin komité.” A Provisional National Assembly was convened in Debrecen in December 1944, in the shadow of the Red Army. The first resolutions of the Provisional National Assembly instructed the executive, which also had been set up more or less in accordance with Soviet instructions, to conclude cease-fire agreements with the antifascist Allied Powers. The cabinet was recruited from the left-wing opposition parties of the period between the two wars.

A truly representative Parliament began operating following National Assembly elections on 4 November 1945. A newly adopted suffrage law granted the right to vote to all men and women.
over the age of 20. It also put an end to property and education requirements. Voters did not choose individuals but instead, cast ballots for lists of candidates submitted by various political parties for each constituency. In addition, they voted for 50-member lists of “national candidates,” who were to be awarded seats in priority order, based on the proportions of voters choosing the various lists. This promised to result in a Parliament with very strong party commitments. Six parties were granted permission to run in the elections and five of them won seats. The parties were: the Independent Smallholders’ Party (FKgP) which won 59.9 per cent of the vote, the Social Democratic Party (SZDP) which won 16.9 per cent, the Hungarian Communist Party (MKP) which took 17.1 per cent, the National Peasant Party (NPP) with 5.6 per cent, the Civic Democratic Party (PDP) with 0.5 per cent, and the Hungarian Radical Party (MRP) which won no seats.

Shortly after it was elected, the new Parliament chose to alter the form of state: as of February 1946, Hungary changed from a monarchy to a republic. In conformity with the Yalta Agreement of the war-winning Allied Powers, a very broad coalition of parties took the helm of government. This coalition – confirmed in office by elections – was so broad that for all intents and purposes, the new government had no opposition. Nevertheless, the debates in Parliament, and especially outside of the legislature, were spirited – and occasionally tempestuous. The Independent Smallholders’ Party had an absolute majority and it operated in accordance with the rules of parliamentary democracy, which allowed it to name both the President and the Prime Minister. The Hungarian Communist Party was particularly chafed by this, and initiated repeated counter-offensives. Lining up the other two minority members of the coalition (the Social Democrats and the Peasant Party) alongside it, it formed a Left Wing Bloc, which was
increasingly effective in neutralizing and eventually countering the majority Smallholders. As time went on it became apparent that despite party clashes within the coalition the Smallholders were not going to give in – or as Communist party leader Mátyás Rákosi put it: “get broken down into its elements.” So, in early 1947, the Communists changed tactics. Using the political police, whom the Communists had dominated from the time the force was established, the party concocted a criminal case intended to prove that the heads of the nation’s biggest party had conspired to overthrow the republic. (Please note that this would have meant turning against their own parliamentary majority.)

The political nature and purpose of the Communist charges, together with the procedure they initiated, became clear in the spring of 1947, after the Soviet military authorities occupying the country abducted Béla Kovács, general secretary of the Independent Smallholders’ Party. This happened following a parliamentary vote that rejected a motion to suspend Kovács’s parliamentary immunity and turn him over to the Hungarian political police who were investigating the so-called conspiracy. With the abduction, it became clear to public opinion that the Soviet Union – supporting the Communists’ effort to achieve totalitarianism – was now willing to actively intervene in Hungary’s domestic politics.

Three months later, in May 1947, Rákosi used the same slander – alleged ties to “conspirators” – to discredit the Smallholders’ Prime Minister, Ferenc Nagy, at a time when he was abroad. Rákosi ordered Nagy to return to Hungary immediately, but he, choosing not to be abducted as his fellow party-member had been, tendered his resignation and remained in emigration. Three days later, when he learned that a warrant had been issued for his arrest, Béla Varga, Speaker of Parliament, also a Smallholder, followed Nagy into emigration. Once the largest party in Parliament had
been deprived of its leadership in this way, it began to fall apart. Early elections, called on the grounds that political loyalties had shifted significantly, effectively ended its dominance. Additional parties were allowed to run in this election. The new parties were the Democratic People’s Party (DNP), the Hungarian Independence Party (MFP), the Independent Hungarian Democratic Party (FMDP), and the Christian Women’s Camp (KNT). The distribution of seats following elections in August 1947 was as follows: MKP (Communists) 24.3 per cent, SZDP (Social Democrats) 16.3 per cent, NPP (National Peasant Party) 8.8 per cent, FKgp (Smallholders) 16.5 per cent, DNP (Democratic People’s Party) 14.6 per cent, MFP (Independence Party) 11.9 per cent, and FMDP (Independent Democrats) 4.4 per cent. Three parties which garnered about one per cent of the vote were MRP (Radicals), KNT (Christian Women), and PDP (Civic Democrats). Put together, the Left Wing Block (which took 49.4 per cent) and the Smallholders had 65.94 per cent of the seats, while the Opposition 34.06 per cent.

The Communists used election fraud – major, minor and some of it exposed immediately – to increase their votes, making them the party which got the largest number of mandates. What was particularly apparent – even to contemporaries – was that the vast majority of the large number of voters who abandoned the Smallholders did not choose the left coalition but had voted for centrist and right wing parties that had been organized in the very last weeks before the elections. In other words, it appeared that representative democracy had survived in Parliament despite the Communists and their satellite parties. The latter were unable to reach their primary election target, which was to become a parliamentary majority without the support of the Smallholders. Instead, the Opposition, which had initially been negligible, now held one-third of the seats.

Ornate entrance to Delegation Hall
Space surrounding main staircase
The Communist MKP was desperate to get an absolute majority for the Left Wing Bloc. The Communist-led election court rushed to its assistance by nullifying all the mandates of MFP, one of the opposition parties, citing invalid signatures on the petitions that had put it on the ballot in the first place. Its nearly fifty seats were left empty and the huge drop in Members automatically reshaped the proportions of representation by the remaining parties. So, the Left Bloc parties became a majority in the legislature, thanks to abuses of judicial power.

By the time the lines of power in the new Parliament had become clear, the Information Office of Communist and Workers’ Parties had been established. The Cominform initiative was aimed at supporting Communist parties in ascending to exclusive power in their own countries. Over the next year, in Hungary this led to the selective devouring of the Social Democratic Party, which it had used as an allied ancillary group. As contemporaries euphemistically put it, the two parties “merged.” The Hungarian Workers’ Party (MDP), the renamed and enlarged Communist party, came about in the summer of 1948. By this time, we can hardly speak of a Parliament organized or operating in the traditional sense. Until then, care had been taken to legitimize political will affecting broad social strata (such as extensive re-allocations of property). Compared to that, a political meeting designed by conspirators was held in March 1948 that simply declared — and carried out (!) — the nationalization of all private businesses employing over one hundred people.
Throughout the forty years that followed the Communist takeover of 1948 — until 1989 — the role of Parliament was limited to the occasional legislative legitimization of the will of one-party rule. In 1949, the country was re-named a “People’s Republic” while the institution of president was terminated and replaced by a small body charged with playing the presidential role. This was the Presidential Council of the People’s Republic. The Presidential Council was granted extensive authorities to substitute for Parliament. Therefore, the latter met only once or twice a year for sessions lasting one or two days. Throughout this era, nearly five times more executive decrees than laws were adopted year after year. If we leave out the years of regime change at the start and end of this period, only 15 per cent of the regulations within the authority of the legislature were actually submitted to Parliament before they came into force.

Even during the years of one-party rule, parliamentary elections were held on an average of once every five years, but they did no more than create an illusion of parliamentary democracy. Until the early 1960s, Member fluctuation was principally the outcome of sweeps within the party involving various connivances and trumped up charges. In the first phase of the period known as the Rákosi era (1948-1956), fully one-third of the Parliament established after the 1949 elections and nearly half of the Cabinet ended up in prison or on the gallows. The “cleansing” of a similar in scope following the defeat of the 1956 revolution and freedom fight lasted until the end of the 1950s, marking the initial period of Communist restoration headed by János Kádár.

In principle, candidates for Parliament were nominated by a socio-political organization, called the Patriotic People’s Front,
dubbed a mass organization that ostensibly rested on a broader base than the Communist party. However, in every single case, the decision on who was to be a Member was made by the central and regional bodies of the Communist party. Their considerations in choosing Members included maintaining a 70-75 per cent ratio of party members. Within that they had to spread representation appropriately among “the working class and working peasants,” the professionals, the young generations, and women, making sure that Parliament contained the desired proportions. Given these restrictions, there was very little significance to the fact that as of the 1960s, central lists gave way to a system in which Members represented specific constituencies. Allowing the nomination of two (multiple) candidates for a parliamentary seat, starting in the 1970s, was similarly irrelevant. There was no election in this era in which People’s Front candidates were declared to have won less than 96 per cent of the vote. Communiqués issued by the party’s leadership regularly announced: “our working people have supported the policies of our party and government with a sweeping majority.” The fraudulence of declarations on this level of social support became increasingly clear as the regime began to collapse.

During the final years of the Communist era – primarily after 1987 – there was a noteworthy shift in (among other things) parliamentary operations. While there continued to be a dominance of the law decrees of previous decades, the number of laws, in part promoting the transformation, began to grow. In fact, by 1989 the laws were in the majority. Taking advantage of the legal opportunity to recall Members, a growing number of grass roots initiatives replaced representatives of the ancien régime with Members who were truly supported by their constituents. To bring the era to an end, on the 33rd anniversary of the 1956 revolution this transitional Parliament resolved to change the country’s form of state.
The Republic of Hungary is an independent democratic state operating under the rule of law. Since the amendment of the Constitution of 23 October 1989, Hungary has been a state in the form of a republic and a parliamentary republic by form of government. The Government is accountable to Parliament and governs the country, backed by the support of the majority of voters. Legislative power is exercised by a unicameral National Assembly, whose members are elected for four years.

As from 1902 the National Assembly has been holding its sessions in Parliament Building in Budapest. The building is rated among the most magnificent parliamentary buildings in the world, which is proven by the hundreds of thousands of tourists visiting it annually. It is worth finding some time to study the legislative work that takes place within the walls of Parliament Building, as the laws enacted by the National Assembly are of decisive importance in the everyday life of Hungarian society.

1. ELECTION OF THE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

The Hungarian electoral system is a so-called mixed system. It is perhaps the most complicated in its kind in Europe. Its majority component ensures governability, and the component of proportionality ensures fair representation. Under the universal and equal suffrage the 386 MPs are elected directly by secret ballot at the general elections held in every four years. Any person entitled to vote in the elections is also eligible to run for a seat in Parliament.

During elections every voter is given two ballot tickets, one to vote for the candidate in the single-member constituency, and one...
to vote for the regional, i.e. the Budapest and the county party lists. Citizens do not vote directly on candidates on the national party lists. Here the mandates are distributed according to a set of complicated compensation rules. At each general elections a total of 176 representatives are elected from the constituencies. The aggregate number of representatives awarded a seat from the regional and national lists is always 210, although their distribution differs from one election to another.

Parties must acquire at least 5% of the votes in order to make it to Parliament. The five parties that have won mandates in the 2006 general elections are the following:

- Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) 190 MPs
- Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Union (Fidesz) and the Christian Democratic People's Party (joint list) 164 MPs
- Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) 20 MPs
- Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) 11 MPs

2. ORGANIZATION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The powers of the National Assembly are exercised by the plenary. The plenary debates the proposals submitted, and resolves to pass or reject them: it enacts laws or passes resolutions. The work of the plenary is assisted by the officers of the National Assembly elected from among the MPs: the Speaker and the Deputy Speakers chair the sittings with assistance from the Notaries. Plenary sittings are prepared by the House Committee, which also makes proposal as to its agenda. The House Committee, together with the Speaker, is also responsible for the smooth functioning of the National Assembly.
Assembly. Deliberation of the submissions on the agenda is prepared by the Committees. The Members’ preparation and contribution in Parliament is coordinated by the parliamentary groups of the parties. The material and technical conditions for Parliament’s work are ensured by the Office of the National Assembly.

THE CONSTITUTION OF PARLIAMENT

After the general elections in April, the National Assembly held its constituent sitting on 16 May 2006. The constituent sitting is convened by the President of the Republic.

At the constituent sitting the National Assembly establishes the fundamental personnel and organizational conditions for its operation. The Assembly adopts the reports on the elections, attests and verifies the mandates of the MPs, who take the oath afterwards, and elects the officers of Parliament. The National Assembly may at the constituent sitting form the standing committees of the House, however, this may also be postponed to a later date.

Election of the officers of Parliament and the composition of committees are based on the political consensus between the party groups in Parliament. Introduced in 1990, this system ensures that decisions on major organizational issues are made by consensus rather than by the will of the majority.

The mandate of the outgoing Government terminates once the new National Assembly is constituted, but the old Government remains in office as an interim Government until the new Government is formed. It is at the constituent sitting of the National Assembly that the President of the Republic makes his recommendation for the post of prime minister. The new Gyurcsány Government was formed on 9 June 2006, after the Committee hearings of

János Horváth, Chair of Age, presiding over the constituent sitting of the National Assembly
candidates for the ministerial posts were concluded and the Government’s programme was debated and adopted, and the Prime Minister formally appointed.

OFFICERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The National Assembly elects a Speaker, Deputy Speakers and Notaries from among the Members by secret ballot. In 1990 and 1994 Parliament elected three Deputy Speakers and eight Notaries, in 1998 their numbers were three and ten, and in 2002 and 2006, five and ten respectively.

SPEAKER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The main tasks of the Speaker are:

• to see to the preservation of the prestige of Parliament, to the maintenance of order and security of Parliament;
• to organize the work of Parliament and to coordinate the work of the Committees;
• to convene parliamentary sessions and individual sittings during sessions;
• to open and chair the sittings impartially, to comply with the provisions of the Standing Orders and to maintain the order of the sittings;
• to convene and chair the meetings of the House Committee;
• to represent Parliament in the course of fostering international relations;
• to represent Parliament in its relations with other state, social and other organizations;
• to direct the work of the Office of the National Assembly, and to appoint heads of the organizational units.
In a way similar to countries, the Speaker is the third highest dignitary in Hungary, after the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister.

Since the transition, Parliament has always elected a Speaker from among the politicians of the biggest party in power: György Szabad (MDF) in 1990, Dr. Zoltán Gál (MSZP) in 1994, Dr. János Áder (Fidesz) in 1998, and Dr Katalin Szili (MSZP) in both 2002 and 2006.

DEPUTY SPEAKERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The main duty of the Deputy Speakers is to alternate, along with the Speaker, in chairing the sittings of Parliament. Apart from this, Deputy Speakers have no independent powers but the Speaker may, from time to time charge them with different tasks, mainly in conjunction with Parliament’s foreign relations: they head and receive delegations.

NOTARIES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

At the sittings of Parliament, two notaries serve simultaneously, one belonging to a governing party and one to an opposition party. The Notaries authenticate the verbatim minutes of the sessions and of parliamentary resolutions. They proceed as a committee for counting the votes in the event of secret balloting.

THE HOUSE COMMITTEE

No organ consisting of the Speaker, the Deputy Speakers and the parliamentary group leaders existed in the history of Hungarian parliamentarism before 1990. Parliaments of many
other states had long established a similar body (referred to as the Main Committee, the Presidency, the Bureau, the Committee of Wise Men, etc.), which served as a pattern for the House Committee of the Hungarian Parliament.

The House Committee makes proposals for the agenda of the National Assembly and as to when and how the various submissions should be deliberated.

The House Committee takes a position on the work schedule of sessions (proposing, for example, that plenary sittings be held on Mondays and Tuesdays and, similarly, which days of the week committees meet).

The House Committee develops the principles of the budget of Parliament and takes a position on issues concerning the press publicity of the work of Parliament. It also prepares celebrations in Parliament, and determines the order of accounting for MPs’ absences from plenary.

Operation of the House Committee is based on consensus. Voting rights are granted only to the parliamentary group leaders. In case no consensus is reached, the Speaker of the National Assembly is entitled to take the decision or make a proposal. A Government delegate regularly attends House Committee sessions, with the right to consultation. The delegate’s opinion is an important consideration when proposals for the agenda are developed.

COMMITTEES

According to the Standing Orders of the National Assembly, there are two main types of committees: standing committees and temporary committees.
STANDING COMMITTEES

At or after its constituent sitting, Parliament sets up its standing committees and passes a decision on the numbers of their officers and members. Since 1990 the system of standing committees has always been determined by parliamentary party group consensus. The Standing Orders of Parliament provides that it is obligatory to set up the committees dealing with constitutional matters, the budget, foreign affairs, national defence, as well as with matters of immunity, incompatibility, the verification of credentials and, more recently, European Union affairs.

The standing committees are established to match the structure of the Government. Some of the standing committees are established to handle issues related to the internal operation of Parliament and the legal status of MPs (for example the Committee on Standing Orders and the Committee on Immunity, Incompatibility and Credentials).

Standing committees are bodies of Parliament to take initiatives, make proposals and participate in the supervision of government work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>At constituent sitting</th>
<th>At end of term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990–1994</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994–1998</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998–2002</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002–2006</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In May 2006 the new Parliament developed a simpler and more cost-efficient system that includes 18 standing committees:

The Committee on Agriculture interviews József Gráf, candidate for the position of Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, before his appointment (the candidate is in the centre, next to Sándor Font, Chairman of the Committee)
The Committee of European Affairs hearing Kinga Göncz, candidate for the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs, before her appointment

- Constitutional, Judicial and Standing Orders Committee (29 members)
- Committee on Health (23 members)
- Committee on Human Rights, Minorities, Civil and Religious Affairs (19 members)
- Committee on European Affairs (20 members)
- Committee on Employment and Labour (19 members)
- Economic and Information Technology Committee (29 members)
- Defence and Law Enforcement Committee (17 members)
- Committee on Youth, Social and Family Affairs (29 members)
- Committee on Budget, Finance and Audit Office (29 members)
- Committee on Environmental Protection (19 members)
- Committee on Culture and the Media (19 members)
- Foreign Affairs and Hungarian Minorities Abroad Committee (20 members)
- Committee on Immunity, Incompatibility and Credentials (10 members)
- Committee on Agriculture (22 members)
- Committee on National Security (11 members)
- Committee on Education and Science (23 members)
- Local Government and Urban Development Committee (29 members)
- Committee on Sport and Tourism (19 members)

Only Members of Parliament can be officers and members of the standing committees. Ministers and state secretaries cannot be members as one of the main tasks of the committees is to contribute to the supervision of government work.
When developing its system of committees the new National Assembly followed the main rule that each MP should work in one standing committee only. This resulted in a significant reduction in the number of committee positions, which is now 386, identical with the number of MPs sitting in Parliament.

Each MP must have an opportunity to be involved in the work of at least one standing committee.

In accordance with the principle of proportionality, MPs of the governing parties have a majority in the standing committees. However, in the Committee on Immunity, Incompatibility and Credentials and in most committees of inquiry the principle of parity is applied, thus the committee shall include the same number of MPs from the governing parties as from the opposition.

Standing committees set up sub-committees to attend to their specific tasks. Each standing committee has to establish a sub-committee for the monitoring of implementation of Acts falling within the committee’s competence as well as their social and economic impact. Most of the standing committees have also set up a sub-committee on European Union affairs. Officers and members of the standing committees are entitled to supplementary remuneration for their work.

**Temporary Committees**

There are two types of temporary committees: committees of inquiry and Ad Hoc Committees. Ad Hoc Committees are set up to examine issues of current importance. During the past parliamentary term, such issues were, for instance, the preparation of a national equestrian programme and the promotion of the ragweed eradication programme. Committees of inquiry are formed to
examine a particular issue that generally involves the responsibility of the Government (or a Government member). In the period from 1990 to 2006, MPs initiated the formation of 104 committees of investigation, 24 of which were actually set up by Parliament: 15 were supported by the opposition, eight by the governing parties, and one by both sides. Results of the work of both types of committees are presented in the form of a report submitted to the plenary that passes a resolution on the acceptance or rejection of the report following its general debate. However, most of the 30 committees set up since 1990 were terminated without submitting a report due to a lack of agreement. Reports can only be submitted with the agreement of both the governing and the opposition parties.

Only Members of Parliament can be officers or members of committees of inquiry. Conversely, Ad Hoc Committees may have members that are not MPs, however, such members do not have voting rights. Members of temporary committees are not remunerated for their work.

**MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS**

The weekly meetings of the committee chairpersons play a special part in coordinating committee work. The meeting makes proposals to the House Committee on the agenda of Parliament, and to the Speaker of Parliament on the designation of committees to debate specific bills. Issues that concern all of the committees are also discussed at the meetings, for example distribution of funds available to cover the committees’ material expenses and for expert fees, international relations, the format of committee websites, etc. Meetings of the committee chairpersons are convened and chaired by the Deputy Speakers.
OPERATION OF THE COMMITTEES

Standing committees may address any issue falling within their competence. Committees have regular meetings (generally on a weekly basis). A committee shall have a quorum if more than half of its members are present. Under the Standing Orders of Parliament, committee members who are unable to attend a committee meeting may commission another member of the same committee to act as proxy. Participation of delegates of the Government (ministries) is a key condition for committee work when the items of the committee’s agenda are discussed. Committees may also invite heads of civil organizations, advocacies and, in accordance with the latest relevant statutory provisions, lobbyist to take part in the discussion of specific issues. Committees may also involve experts to assist with their work. Committee meetings are open to representatives of the media, but if the nature of the agenda item so requires, committees may also decide to sit in camera in order to protect state secrets, service secrets or of other data which may not be published. (The National Security Committee and the Committee on Immunity, Incompatibility and Credentials typically hold in camera meetings.) Committees adopt positions or pass resolutions as a result of their deliberations. Verbatim minutes are taken at the committee meetings, which are also available on the web site of the National Assembly.

PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS OF THE PARTIES IN PARLIAMENT

In accordance with the Standing Orders of the National Assembly, MPs belonging to the same party form parliamentary groups in order to coordinate their work in Parliament.
Members belonging to the same party may form only one parliamentary group.

Under the Standing Orders in effect during the 1990–94 term, at least 10 MPs were needed to form a party group in Parliament. The 1994 amendment required a minimum of 15 MPs. In 1998 the Constitutional Court ruled this provision anti-constitutional and abrogated it on the grounds that it banned parties passing the 5% threshold to make it to Parliament from setting up their parliamentary groups if the number of their MPs was below 15. Thus the rules of forming parliamentary groups should have been revisited and the Standing Orders amended accordingly. However, the motions did not receive the statutory two-thirds majority vote in the 1998–2002 term, nor in 2002–2006, so the Standing Orders currently do not provide for any limit for the formation of parliamentary groups.

A Member may quit the parliamentary group of his party and the parliamentary group may expel its Members. Members who have quitted, or have been expelled from, their parliamentary group must be regarded as independent and may join another parliamentary group only after six months. This restriction was introduced by the 1994 Standing Orders with the intent to stabilize the parliamentary groups by making it more difficult to MPs to change their colours.

Parliamentary groups may cease and new ones may be established during a parliamentary term. Parties other than those entered in the elections may also form their parliamentary groups.
At the constituent sitting of the 1990–1994 Parliament, six parliamentary groups announced their formation: the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), the Independent Smallholders Party (FKgéP), the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), the Alliance of Young Democrats (Fidesz), and the Christian Democratic People’s Party (KDNP). MDF, FKgéP and KDNP were parliamentary groups of the governing parties, while SZDSZ, MSZP and Fidesz were groups of the opposition. Later the FKgéP group split into two, and before the end of the term a new parliamentary group, the Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIÉP) was formed.

The 1994–1998 term saw the same six parliamentary groups: MSZP, SZDSZ, MDF, FKgéP, KDNP and Fidesz to begin parliamentary work, then some of the MDF Members of Parliament established a new party, and the group of the Hungarian Democratic People’s Party split from MDF. By the end of the term the KDNP group ceased.

At the constituent sitting of the 1998–2002 Parliament again six parties announced the formation of parliamentary groups. Reflecting the composition of the governing coalition, Fidesz, FKgéP and MDF constituted the parliamentary groups of the governing parties and MSZP, SZDSZ and MIÉP were the opposition groups. For the first time since 1990 the parliamentary groups remained unchanged until the end of the term as no new groups were formed and none were terminated.

Only four groups announced their formation at the constituent sitting of the 2002–2006 Parliament: MSZP and SZDSZ of
the governing parties, and Fidesz and MDF of the opposition. Although some of the MPs quitted their group and others were expelled the four groups survived until the end of the term.

In the wake of the 2006 parliamentary elections, five groups announced their formation. KDNP and Fidesz entered joint candidates in the elections but formed independent parliamentary groups.

Parliamentary groups of the governing parties (54.40%)
- Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) 190 MPs
- Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) 20 MPs

Parliamentary groups of the opposition parties (45.45%)
- Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Union (Fidesz) 141 MPs
- Christian Democratic People’s Party (KDNP) 23 MPs
- Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) 11 MPs
- Independent Members 1 MP

**Organization and Operation of the Parliamentary Groups**

The Standing Orders of Parliament only set forth the basic rules of formation and cessation of parliamentary groups of the parties. The detailed rules of their organizational structure and operation are laid down in the Statutes or Rules and Regulations adopted by the parliamentary groups. Each parliamentary group elects a leader from among its members, and may elect other officers (such as deputy leaders and group manager) to deal with parliamentary group matters.

Unlike plenary and committee sessions, meetings of the parliamentary groups are not open to the public. MPs prepare for plenary sittings in the parliamentary groups, where they develop their
positions on different issues of parliamentary work and discuss their organizational and personnel matters. The larger parliamentary groups tend to set up working groups matching the committee system to address bills, to develop and coordinate their amendment motions, and to prepare for committee meetings.

Parliamentary groups and their leaders have a decisive role in a number of important aspects of parliamentary work. This includes, among others, the nomination of officers and committee members of Parliament, as well as elaboration of the agenda of plenary sessions. Parliamentary group leaders are members of the House Committee with the right to vote, and may take the floor before the orders of the day has been approved.

**INDEPENDENT MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT**

Members of Parliament who have not joined any parliamentary group of the parties in Parliament are regarded as independent. Independent MPs are those Members who have won their seat as independent candidates in the general elections, or those who have won their seat as candidates of a party but their numbers are insufficient to form a parliamentary group. Thus, “independence” is not necessarily a category of political alignment but a matter of fact, and only indicates whether the MP is a member of a parliamentary group or not.

Because of the nature of the Hungarian electoral system candidates securing a seat in Parliament are almost exclusively those who are nominated (or supported) by the parties; as a result, there are very few independent Members of Parliament. On the other hand, their numbers multiply by the end of the term due to a withdrawals or expulsions from the parliamentary groups.
MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

LEGAL STATUS OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

Free mandate is the basis of the legal status of MPs in Hungary, similarly to other countries. Once elected, MPs become legally independent of their voters and represent the entire population. They shall form their positions to the best of their conscience and conviction and shall vote accordingly.

The overwhelming majority of MPs are affiliated to the parliamentary group of one of the parties. To start with, they secured their seat as candidates of, or with the support of, one or more parties. The “party principle” determines the political structure of Parliament and the activities of MPs. However, if MPs leave their parliamentary groups or their groups expel them, they are not required to renounce their mandate.

The rights and duties of MPs fall into two major categories. The first includes rights and responsibilities related to parliamentary work, for example the right to participate in plenary and committee sessions, the right to take the floor, the right to submit bills,
the right to vote, the right to hold offices in Parliament, the right to form a parliamentary group, and the right to information.

The other category includes rights and responsibilities that provide the conditions for legislative work, for instance the right to immunity, incompatibility, and the right to remuneration and different forms of allowance and reimbursement.

It is a fundamental right and duty of a Member to participate with initiatives in the work of Parliament and to promote its operation. Over a certain level of unjustified absence from the sittings (more than one-third of the voting times) the Member is penalized by the withdrawal of a proportionate part of their remuneration.

MPs are expected to keep in touch with their electors and take their opinion into consideration. To this end, MPs organize civic forums and have calling hours when they are available to their voters, and answer e-mails or letters from voters.

**RIGHTS PROMOTING MPS’ LEVEL OF INFORMATION**

Members of Parliament can only carry out their tasks successfully if they possess all the information relevant and necessary for their work. The Act on the Legal Status of Members of Parliament and the Standing Orders of Parliament support this need in two ways. On the one hand, state agencies are required by law to support MPs in fulfilling their tasks and provide them with all information they need. On the other hand, the law provides that MPs have the right to access public institutions and documents.

**THE RIGHT TO IMMUNITY**

In order to allow MPs to carry out their activities undisturbed, they enjoy a particular form of protection called parliamentary
immunity. Parliamentary immunity has two forms: exemption from liability and inviolability. For the duration of his mandate, an MP shall not be liable for his declarations, speeches or votes cast during his work (exemption from liability). Members of Parliament may only be arrested if caught in flagrante delicto, and any kind of criminal procedure or misdemeanour proceedings can only be initiated or coercive measures applied with the prior consent of the National Assembly (inviolability). The National Assembly may suspend immunity of an MP with the votes of two thirds of the MPs present. Once the mandate of an MP expires he is no longer protected by immunity and is liable to proceedings.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The Constitution, the Act on the Legal Status of Members of Parliament and other laws establish incompatibility rules for MPs. The purpose of these rules is to ensure the independence of the legislative work of MPs and prevent undesirable attempts to influence an MP, and to avoid the overlapping of positions and offices. These laws, above all the Act on the Legal Status of Members of Parliament, define in detail the public positions and offices as well as the positions in state-owned or municipality-owned companies which may not be held by MPs. They also define the cases where an MP becomes unworthy of continued service in Parliament. MPs are obliged to eliminate causes of conflict of interest within a given time frame, and if they fail to do so, the National Assembly may pronounce incompatibility and may deprive them of their mandate.
DISCLOSURE OF ASSETS
AND OTHER REPORTING COMMITMENTS

In Hungary, the law allows an MP to be gainfully employed (unless it is against the provisions on incompatibility) or to pursue a paid profession. However, it is to be borne in mind that because of the nature of work involved, being an MP limits the possibilities of taking up jobs with fixed working hours. MPs have to report to the Speaker on their employment, on owning independent businesses or foundations, as well as on their membership, positions, ownership stakes and incomes received from businesses, cooperatives and public bodies.

MPs have to declare and disclose their assets, income and business interests. This obligation is extended to spouses and children living in the same household. The latest amendment of the relevant law also requires MPs to disclose any state support or support from European Union funds that businesses owned by them or their close family members have received. Since 2005 the annual assets disclosures of MPs must be published on the web site of the National Assembly.

MPS’ REMUNERATION AND EXPENSE ALLOWANCES

Similarly to other Parliaments, the financial independence of the Members of the Hungarian Parliament is ensured by means of remunerations and other benefits defined by law.

As of April 2006, the basic monthly remuneration of MPs amounts to HUF 220,800 forints. By amending the Act on the Remuneration of Members of Parliament the new National Assembly introduced major changes in the system of supplementary fees and reimbursement. As a general rule, every MP is a
A member of one committee and is thus entitled to a supplementary fee of 70% of the basic remuneration (or HUF 154,560). If an MP serves on two committees, the supplementary fee for membership in the second committee will only be 25% (or HUF 35,200). Members of the Constitutional Affairs Committee, the Committee on the Budget and the Committee on European Affairs are entitled to 90% supplementary fees (HUF 198,720).

Additional fee is also paid to the Deputy Speakers (180%, amounting to a total of HUF 618,240 including the basic remuneration), the Notaries (70%, totalling HUF 375,360), the chairs of the standing committees (120%, totalling HUF 485,760), their vice chairs (100%, totalling 441,600), as well as leaders (120%, totalling HUF 485,760) and deputy leaders of parliamentary groups (100%, totalling 441,600).

The remuneration of the Speaker is the same as that of the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, the President of the Constitutional Court, and the President of the Supreme Court (HUF 1,435,200 in 2006).

The amendment of the relevant law adopted at the constituent sitting introduced a more differentiated and more economical system of allowances and reimbursement. The reimbursement of MPs who receive reimbursement in relation to other offices they hold (for example because they are mayors) is cut by half. Travel allowance is a minimum of HUF 154,560 and a maximum of HUF 353,280 per month depending on the distance from Budapest.

Non-Budapest resident MPs are entitled to HUF 110,400 housing allowance per month and may employ an assistant with a monthly salary of HUF 132,480. Parliament also resolved that MPs should no longer be entitled to use public transportation free of charge and shall cover these travel costs from their travel allowance.
MPs whose mandate ceases after their four years in office are entitled to a severance pay amounting to six months’ remuneration.

THE OFFICE OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The Office of the National Assembly organizes the work of the National Assembly. It ensures the continuous and smooth operation of the National Assembly, assists in the preparation of the plenary sittings, the work of the officers, the committees and MPs. The Office of the National Assembly operates under the supervision of the Speaker.

The Office of the National Assembly consists of several organizational units:

- **General Secretariat:** Secretary-General: Dr. István Soltész
- **General Directorate of Finance:** Director-General: Mr. Emil Bakos
- **Library of Parliament:** Director-General: Mr. János Ambrus
- **Office of Foreign Relations:** Head of Office: Dr. Péter Sárdi
- **Cabinet of the Speaker:** Head of Cabinet: György Kerényi
- **Press Service:** Chief Press Officer: Ms. Anita Altorjai

The Office of the National Assembly has a staff of 641 people, and another 221 people assist the work of the five parliamentary groups.
3.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The two main tasks of the National Assembly are legislation and supervision over the work of the Government. The duties pertaining to these tasks are stipulated, in the first place, by the Hungarian Constitution. The most important responsibilities are as follows:

• the enactment of the Constitution,
• the adoption of laws,
• the adoption of the state budget and the monitoring of its implementation,
• the adoption of the programme of the Government and the election of the Prime Minister,
• the election of the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, the President of the Supreme Court, members of the Constitutional Court, the ombudspersons, and other high public dignitaries,
• the ratification of the most important international treaties,
• decision on a declaration of war, peace agreements, the declaration of a state of emergency and martial law,
• the announcement of national referenda.

The responsibilities of the Hungarian National Assembly have considerably and continuously expanded since 1990.
The most important task of Parliaments is legislation. This was particularly true for the Hungarian National Assembly constituted on 2 May 1990. The historical task brought by the transition, the need to develop and consolidate the institutional framework of a state based on the rule of law, and of a market economy, to create new foundations for the legal system and to transform it on an ongoing basis put legislative work in the foreground. The intensity of legislation did not diminish in the subsequent terms either.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>New</th>
<th>Amendment</th>
<th>Acts total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990 – 1994</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994 – 1998</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002 – 2006</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990 – 2006</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>1018</td>
<td>950</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following entities are entitled to submit a bill to the National Assembly:

- the President of the Republic
- the Government
- every parliamentary committee
- any Member of Parliament
Bills are debated in the following order:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases of debate</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>general debate</td>
<td>• debate on the general principles of the regulatory effort and on the entirety, necessity and goals of the bill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>detailed debate</td>
<td>• debate on amendment motions (arguments for and against)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vote on amendments</td>
<td>• vote on each amendment motion (on proposed modifications)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>closing debate</td>
<td>• correction of codification errors, discussion of relevant amendment motions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and final vote</td>
<td>• vote on the amendment motions and the entire bill</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Debates over a bill constitute a rotating system of activities of the plenary and the committees. The procedure of debates is regulated by the Standing Orders.

Each plenary debate is preceded by preparatory work on committee level. First, standing committees appointed by the Speaker of the National Assembly decide whether the bill is suitable for general debate. After the general debate, the committees express their opinion on the amendment motions submitted by MPs and, after the detailed debate, they give their opinion on subsequent amendment motions. If committees consider that necessary, they may submit amendment motions themselves.

The Government, committees and MPs submit 200 bills to the National Assembly on an annual average. The Government, MPs and committees submitted 55%, 40% and 5% of the bills, respectively. Approximately 90% of the enacted bills were submitted by the Government. The National Assembly passes 120 laws on average a year.
THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

**Bill Introduction**

- **SO § 98 (4)**
  If the committee rejected including the bill into the agenda, it shall be announced by the notary of Parliament at the next sitting.

- **OS § 98 (2)**
  Speaker of the House appoints the designated committee(s).

**Committee Consideration**

- **OS § 101, § 102 (1)**
  General debate
  (Amendment motions may be tabled to the bill until the closure of the general debate.)

- **OS § 102 (1), § 105**
  Detailed debate
  (Related amendment motions may be introduced until the closure of the detailed debate)

**Amendment Process**

- **OS § 104 (1)**
  Parliament shall decide whether to put the bill to detailed debate.

- **OS § 102 (3)**
  Committee considers amendment motions. Committee itself may table additional amendment motions.

**Final Stages**

- **OS § 106**
  Vote on proposed amendments

  Consolidated text of bill

  Amendment motions before closing vote

- **OS § 107 (4), (5); § 106 (8)**
  Closing debate and closing vote

  If there is no amendment
  **OS § 104 (2)**
  Amendment motions before closing vote
  Speaker submits bill and motions to Constitutional Committee, which may also table amendment motions.

- **OS § 107 (2)**
  In case of legislative incoherence, amendment motions may be tabled before closing vote.
  Speaker submits bill and motions to Constitutional Committee, which may also table amendment motions.

- **OS § 108 (1)**
  The Speaker signs the bill

  President of Republic signs bill

  Promulgation by Official Gazette
Besides legislation, the other important and increasingly significant task of the National Assembly is to monitor the activities of the Government and the state administration that is controlled by Government. That function focuses on whether the legislators’ intention is implemented and whether the Government operates in accordance with the laws.

The function of Parliament to supervise the activities of the executive power derives from the principle of the Government’s political responsibility towards the National Assembly. The Constitution stipulates that the Government shall be responsible for its operation to the National Assembly and shall report to the National Assembly on its activity on a regular basis. The National Assembly approves the government programme simultaneously with the election of the Prime Minister.

The responsibility of the executive power towards Parliament consists not only of its obligation to report to Parliament, but a parliamentary majority is also entitled to withdraw confidence from the Government if its members disagree with the Government’s policy. With a motion of constructive no confidence, adopted by an absolute majority of the MPs, Parliament may terminate the mandate of the Government, while electing simultaneously, at the same sitting, the head of the new Government, thus ensuring the continuity of governance.

Parliamentary supervision of the Government may be exercised by the plenary, by the committees and by individual MPs. Such supervision may also be executed through specialized agencies operating under parliamentary supervision, such as the State Audit Office or the parliamentary commissioners (ombudspersons).
DURING PLENARY SITTINGS

Important means of supervision are the debate over, and the adoption of, reports of the Government, as well as parliamentary political debates, which may be initiated either by the Government or by one-fifth of MPs.

DURING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Discussions by committees of different reports, information and briefing materials are an important area of parliamentary supervision. The committees are entitled to submit draft resolutions to the National Assembly in which they may initiate measures and tasks in connection with Government reports. Each standing committee has to set up a sub-committee that monitors the implementation of laws, as well as their social and economic impacts. The committees hear the minister-elects before they are appointed, and following that, ministers report to the relevant parliamentary committee on the work his/her ministry has completed annually. On specified subjects, ministers and heads of central agencies of public administration may also be heard at the initiative of two-fifths of committee members.

BY MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

The traditional means of parliamentary supervision that individual MPs may exercise at plenary sittings are interpellations, questions and questions that require a prompt answer. The special weight of interpellation is derives from the fact that (in case the MP concerned does not accept the answer) it is the
National Assembly that decides whether to accept the answer. If the decision is negative, the interpellation is submitted to the plenary again in the form of a committee report.

Members of Parliament have further means of supervising the Government. These include oral contributions outside regular parliamentary business, especially those before the agenda as they are broadcast by television and the radio.

THE SUPERVISORY AGENCIES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

STATE AUDIT OFFICE

The State Audit Office, the National Assembly's own financial and economic supervisory agency has been functioning again since 1990. The State Audit Office is independent of the Government. The State Audit Office prepares an expert opinion on the draft text of the Budget Act, monitors the implementation of the Budget Act, as well as the spending of public money and the management of state assets in general. The competence of the State Audit Office covers all economic activities where public money is involved, and it may carry out inspections on all levels of state administration. The President of the State Audit Office reports to Parliament on his work annually. The parliamentary committee discuss the reports of the State Audit Office in which the results of the audits are analysed.
In 1993, the National Assembly adopted a law on the parliamentary commissioner for human rights, which is an institution that is meant to protect the rights of citizens and supervise the agencies of public administration. Legislation has also been enacted on the appointment of a commissioner for national and ethnic minorities and another one on data protection. The National Assembly elected Ombudspersons for the first time on 30 June 1995. They made a report on their activities to Parliament first in 1997 and then in each subsequent year. Their reports are occasionally discussed by parliamentary committees.

4.
OPERATION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The National Assembly is elected for fours years.
In certain cases defined in the Constitution (for example failure to form a government or motion of no confidence), the President of the Republic may dissolve the National Assembly. Parliament, too, may declare its dissolution prior to the completion of its term. However, since 1990 all Parliaments have completed their four-year terms.

As in the case of most other Parliaments in Europe, the work of the Hungarian National Assembly is marked by lively, occasionally heated debates between the parties in government and opposition. That is the normal state of affairs because, in addition to its legislative and constitutional duties, Parliament has political functions, for instance voicing the major political views and opinions existing in Hungarian society.
Important political issues can be addressed before the order for the day. The order for the day contains the debates on bills and motions with the votes on them, as well as interpellations and questions.

The Constitution lays down the fundamental rules that guarantee the functioning of the National Assembly, and the Standing Orders set forth the detailed rules of its operation. The Constitution may be adopted or amended with two-thirds of the votes of all MPs, while a two-thirds majority of the MPs present is required for the adoption or amendment of the Standing Orders.

The National Assembly holds two regular sessions annually:
• from 1 February to 15 June, and
• from 1 September to 15 December.

An extraordinary session or sitting shall be convened on the request of the President of the Republic, the Government or one-fifth of the Members of Parliament.

When in session, the National Assembly holds sittings weekly, Mondays from 1 p.m. and Tuesdays (and occasionally Wednesdays) from 9 a.m. It is the Speaker of the Parliament who convenes the meetings of the House.

As in most modern Parliaments, the legislative chamber of the National Assembly is semicircular, which is eminently suited to the practical considerations of debates. The majority of government and opposition MPs are seated facing one another. Since 1990 MPs of the Left-Wing parties (MSZP and SZDSZ) have been seated on the left, and those of the Right-Wing parties (Fidesz, MDF, KDNP, FKgP) on the right, regardless of whether they were in government or in opposition.
The history of Parliament is an integral part of the history of the Hungarian nation. Although it looks back upon only a century, Parliament Building has become a symbol of the country. In a survey of public opinion, three-quarters of the respondents mentioned Parliament Building among the national symbols, and more than half ranked it as the number one symbol. Forty-one percent of the voters have visited the building housing their representatives, and another 48% are planning to visit (again). Parliament Building is a prominent tourist “attraction” receiving almost a million visitors a year. Symbol of the Hungarian statehood, St. Stephen’s crown and the coronation regalia are displayed in Parliament Building. The building often houses major international and national conferences, meetings, as well as cultural and other events.

The sittings of Parliament are public, with the exceptions specified in the Constitution. The sittings are broadcast by public television. The main Hungarian public radio channel, Radio Kossuth broadcasts the sittings from beginning to end. In addition, the web site of Parliament also offers live video broadcast of the entire day’s sitting.

The website of Parliament (www.parlament.hu) offers a full-fledged picture of the work of the House. Interested visitors can find out about the bills up for debate, how laws are adopted, what questions and interpellations MPs put forth, and how Parliament voted on a particular issue. Today a verbatim transcript of the minutes of both the plenary and committee sessions is published on Parliament’s website.

The Information Centre of Members of Parliament operates a telephone line and e-mail service (ktk@parlament.hu) for citizens.
There, all questions of Hungarians and foreigners concerning the institutional structure and operation of the National Assembly are answered.

Plenary sittings and the building of Parliament may be visited according to a set schedule. All information concerning visits is available on the web site. MPs may also provide an opportunity for their electorate to visit the building and listen in on the sittings.

The Library of Parliament is a specialized public library. Its holdings, data bases and parliamentary documents support the work of both Parliament users (MPs, committees and experts) and the needs of education and research.

Committees of the National Assembly aim at establishing contacts with a variety of social and civil organizations. A special form of liaising with civil society is the committee open house programme, which is intended to provide a forum for actors of civil society to voice their thoughts and concerns and to consult with MPs.

The Civil Bureau of Parliament also has a major role in liaising with non-governmental organizations, handling complaints and reports from citizens, as well as in gathering opinions on the operation of parliament.

The National Assembly offers a variety of programmes to young people. College and university students can apply for a one-year internship, and secondary school students are offered series of lectures titled “Special Course on Parliament” and “First-time Electors”, both of which include a visit to Parliament. The National Assembly has its own stall at the regular summer event of Budapest, the “Island Festival”, visited by tens of thousands of Hungarians and foreigners year by year.
Az államőrség-ház tervezete.
Parliament Building in Budapest is the home of the Hungarian legislation and it houses offices of public dignitaries. Decorated with many statues and paintings, the magnificent building is worthy of the outstanding role it plays in the life of the Hungarian state also as a work of art. It was built in a single period about one hundred years ago.

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

Bids for designing a permanent Parliament Building were invited in early April 1882, and the deadline for submitting the designs was 1 February 1883. It was decided that the building would be erected along River Danube, but the bidders were practically given a free hand regarding the architectural style. The invitation envisaged that four equivalent prizes would be awarded. Although officially speaking, bidding was international, under the pressure of Hungarian architects, the call was only published in Hungarian specialist journals and newspapers. Consequently, the event became a competition among Hungarian and – to a smaller extent – Viennese architects. Only 19 designs had arrived by the time limit.

The designs prepared by Imre Steindl, Alajos Hauszmann, Albert Schickedanz and Vilmos Freund, as well as Otto Wagner et al. were awarded by the committee in charge of handling the competition. Of these designs, only Steindl’s was neo-Gothic, and the other winning bidders submitted designs of a neo-Renaissance or a neo-baroque building. The committee decided that Parliament Building should be built in a neo-Gothic style, which in effect meant that Imre Steindl’s design was accepted (with some modifications). The neo-Gothic design was mainly supported by (former
Prime Minister and former Austro-Hungarian foreign minister Gyula Andrássy, an influential member of the committee, as he dreamt of a parliamentary building similar to that in London. Imre Steindl (1839-1902), a professor at the Budapest Technical University and a prestigious and dedicated expert on neo-Gothic style, was ideal for Andrássy’s vision.

Then Steindl turned the bidding design into a final as-built design, which took almost a year. On the blueprint the location of the building was shifted northwards, its length reduced and a mezzanine inserted between the ground floor and the first floor. It has been beneficial for the design that pointed spires replaced domes on the two main towers of the façade and on the twice four towers that surrounded the two assembly halls.

The general public also had an opportunity to have a look at the revised design. As expected on such occasions, newspaper articles to describe and criticize the building were published immediately. The question of the style had also provoked strong emotions: there were people who expressed aversion to the Gothic style, believed by many to be German and clerical.

However, the real assessment of the design did not take place in the press, but in chambers of the Hungarian Parliament. Prime Minister Kálmán Tisza submitted a bill on the construction of the building on 13 March 1884. The Lower House conducted a heated and acrimonious debate about the bill for three days. The huge cost of the building was the target of biggest criticism, and many people spoke against the style of the building. Government party deputies defended the project by referring to the representative task of the building, its role to be played in the Millennium celebrations, and its function as a symbol of the Hungarian state and the Constitution. On the last day of the debate, the Lower House had approved the construction with a relatively small majority.
The debate in the Upper House took place in a single day. Act XIX of 1884 on approving the construction plans of a permanent Parliament building and on the execution of construction was endorsed by the monarch on 22 May 1884.

Then the management organization of constructing Parliament Building was set up: there was a construction council, headed by the Prime Minister of the time for handling the daily affairs, and immediate supervision was assigned to a narrower body, Parliament Building construction executive committee. Chair of the latter was Count Lajos Tisza, who had gained distinction earlier as royal commissioner during the reconstruction of the city of Szeged. A work contract was concluded with Imre Steindl on 5 March 1885. The architect was instructed to draw up the detailed designs, make a proposal on the appropriate materials, supervise the work of the contractors and scrutinize their invoices. Steindl appointed Ottó Tandor as his deputy, and Ernő Foerk was requested to design the furnishings. Headed by the ministerial counsel- lor Béla Ney, a technical supervisory group was set up by the government to safeguard accurate compliance with the contract.

Laying the foundations began on 12 October 1885, but it was soon found out that it would take more time and cost more than expected. That was because the intake wells, pipes and lines of the waterworks in the construction site had to be relocated first. Until finishing those activities, construction had to be suspended.

No matter how painful the delay must have been, it allowed further maturing of the design. It was then decided that – contrary to the original conception – it would be unnecessary to break the longitudinal axis of the envisaged building to follow a slight bend of the river. Steindl had drawn up the amended designs by 1886. A further delay of the work enabled Steindl to change the design once again in 1888. In the spring of that year, a wooden hut was
erected in the construction area, where a 1:20, i.e. 5 by 14 metres plaster model of the building was put on display. Many large-size building models have been registered in the history of architecture, but it can hardly be doubted that the model of Parliament Building in Budapest was one of the largest ever made. In addition to finalizing the details, the purpose of making the model must have been providing information to members of the public and keeping up enthusiasm. However, Hungarians had to wait eight more years for the ambitious project to be completed, at least externally.

After a suspension for several months, construction resumed on 25 October 1886. Using huge spotlights, hundreds of people worked on the construction site even at night. The soil had been removed to provide space for the foundations by 31 August 1887. In the meantime, the laying of the foundation had started. Due to the vicinity of River Danube, a coherent layer of concrete was made, with an average thickness of two metres. Once the concrete work had been completed, erection of the walls started.

A special technique was used in the heating system. The building had district heating for which steam boilers were installed 150 metres from Parliament Building in a separate house (currently 1-5 Balassi Bálint Street). The hot steam generated by the boilers was supplied via a properly insulated underground pipeline to Parliament Building, where compartments for distributing hot air were built underneath the large halls. That heating system was considered to be the largest and most advanced in Europe at the time.

In spite of speeding up the work, it had become obvious by 1892 that, contrary to the original intentions, the building would not be ready by the Millennium celebrations of the Hungarian land conquest. Therefore, the construction executive committee
instructed Steindl not to attempt to complete the whole building but concentrate instead on finishing the external parts, the hall under the dome and the main staircase by 1896. On 5 May 1894, the topping out ceremony was held. Traditionally it means that the walls were erected up to the main cornice, i.e. that masonry work was ready. An almost unbelievable quantity of construction materials was used: approximately 40 million bricks for building the walls and 30,000 m³ carved stones for the coating the building.

The complete roof structure, including the skeleton of the dome, was made from rolled and riveted iron by the Schlick factory of Budapest. The roofs were covered with slate and copper sheets. The last arch stone of the inner dome was laid on 16 May 1895, and the scaffolding was removed from the façade in December 1895. On 8 June 1896, which was the 29th anniversary of the crowning of Francis Joseph of Habsburg as king of Hungary, the two Houses of Parliament held a joint festive session. For that occasion the Holy Crown of Hungary and the other regalia were brought there. However, Parliament Building could only be commissioned six years later, on 8 October 1902. Imre Steindl could not enjoy the glory of that day, as he had passed away a few weeks earlier, on 31 August. The activities in the interior were still not finished then and continued until the end of 1904. The total construction cost was officially more than 37 million kronas. That was about double the cost calculated for the final design and four times the budget envisaged at the time the bids had been invited!

After it was commissioned, Parliament Building came into the limelight again. Nobody remained neutral when seeing the building; words of praise and censure were both heard. However, Hungarians could be content to know that they had one of the largest buildings in the world. As such, it was one of those structures built by Hungary to commemorate in 1896 the one thousandth
anniversary of the Hungarian land conquest. The massive size of the building provoked the criticism of contemporaries already at the turn of the 19th century, although at that time Hungary’s territory was three times as large as today.

THE EXTERIOR OF THE BUILDING

The building consists of a long block along River Danube, and a cross wing joining this block perpendicularly from the back. When looking at it from the river, the long block is absolutely symmetrical. In the centre there is the dome, in front of which a pair of towers rise towards the sky. To the left is the former Upper House, and to the right there is a block of buildings that house the Lower House. At the two ends of the long block, a slightly lower roofing was built over the offices of the two Houses. This means that the blocks of building, starting from the two sides, rhythmically and gradually rise, to reach their peak at the dome. By the varied, in fact, dramatic grouping of the blocks, the architect has successfully avoided the inevitably threatening monotony of such a large building. The dimensions of Parliament Building are impressive indeed: the length is 265 metres, the largest width is 123 metres and the height of the dome from the level of the paving is 96 metres.

Steindl made sure that the two views of the building should be well distinguishable: viewed from the river (western side), the building is less formal but more richly ornamented, whereas the side towards the city (eastern side) is formal and strict. There is a line of arcades on the Danube side: on two sides it proceeds along the ground floor and in the centre it rises to the level of the first floor, so as to emphasize further the priority role of the dome.
There are no archways in the side blocks and at the two sides of the central projection, where thick – although functionless – flying buttresses are used. The alternation of arcades, flying and standard buttresses contribute to the versatile, vibrating impact of the main façade, just like the windows in the upstairs sections, which are densely used and richly decorated with crockets and finials.

On the city side of the cross wing, there is a triple gate at the main entrance with thick columns and pilasters. On the two sides of the cross wing, there are further entrances opening from the driveways; altogether 17 gates are available to enter the building. The too short façades are dominated by pedimented central projections, on the ground floor section of which a further driveway entrance is located. The deepened location lends a special dimension to that part of the building.

Parliament Building owes its liveliness mainly to the versatility of its roof profiles. The sexdecagon plan, ribbed, steeply rising dome sits on a drum, and is surrounded by flying buttresses, and its rise leads to the pointed and serrated finial. The two main towers are neo-Gothic structures worthy of attention: the fairy-tale effect of their block slimmed in three phases is emphasized by the many turrets and waterspouts and the copper flag bearer statues. The roof structures emphasizing the locations of the chambers consist of steeply rising main blocks, which are surrounded by four corner towers with pointed ends. The bottom part is embraced by a moulding richly serrated with turrets. All roof ridges are crowned by an artistic wrought iron handrail, which eases the sharp contours. The effect is further improved by the great many small turrets, finials and traceries of the roof.

The façades are decorated by as many as 90 stone statues. They portray outstanding personalities of Hungarian history; in fact, the idea of a Hungarian national Pantheon does not appear in
such a dimension anywhere else. The figure of Prince Árpád stands on the central pillar on the north side, and the south side is decorated with the statue of King St. Stephen. At the third most important part of the building, above the main entrance, the figures of two noted kings, Nagy Lajos (Louis the Great), and (Corvin) Matthias represent the might of medieval Hungary. When proceeding from north to south in the section of the building located along the Danube, the figures of Hungarian monarchs can be seen in a chronological order. There is nothing “Gothic” in the style of the statues, as they are characterized by the realism characterizing the end of the 19th century. Steindl demanded a uniform appearance in style, formal positioning and historical accuracy. Although 23 sculptors, including some of the most outstanding Hungarian artists of the era, made them, they share the same style. They are integrated in the architectural whole.

Coats of arms have a prominent role. Above the main entrance, the central pediment features the angel-carried (historical) coats of arms of Hungary and its dominions; and below them, along the eastern side of the building, there is a long row of coats of arms of towns and counties.

There are two impressive “sitting lion” statues in front of the main entrance. They are large-size counterparts of lion figures that safeguarded churches in the Middle Ages. They are the work of Béla Markup. In front of each of the two pillars of the entrance, there is a nicely decorated lamp, and behind them the entrance arches feature a wrought iron gate — made by Gyula Jungfer’s workshop.

As described, the arrangement of the blocks within Parliament Building is symmetric and yet dynamic, which mostly recalls the architectural principles of baroque in the 17th-18th centuries. However, the architecture of the façades is similar to medieval
Gothic. Hungarian historicist architecture reaches its high point in Parliament Building. Even if some its characteristic architectural forms are similar to Friedrich Schmidt's works (he was Steindl's master in Vienna), it has such a picturesque system of towers, the dome, pilasters, turrets and stone carvings that, overall, it is unique.

It is worth comparing Parliament Building in Budapest with other parliamentary buildings abroad. The riverside location of the Houses of Parliament in London (1835-65) and its elongated block has obviously served as an example for designing its Budapest counterpart. The neo-Gothic style of the two buildings – even if they represent different variants of the same style – is another common feature. On Parliament Building in Vienna (1873-83) there are porticoes to indicate the location of the central hall and the two chambers, but neither the tower, nor the dome provide vertical emphasis. The Reichstag in Berlin (1882-98) is topped by a dome-like structure of a square plan, but in that case a bicameral system is not involved. The block of buildings of the Washington Capitolium (1792-1827, 1850-63) is identified by the two chambers located symmetrically and also by a dome rising in the centre, which makes the two parliamentary buildings very similar. However, there is a basic difference in style: the American Capitolium is a classicist building. The Canadian Parliament Building in Ottawa (1859-67) is noteworthy for Hungarians because it is also neo-Gothic and has a round hall under a dome. However, the latter is a separate unit and houses the Library of Parliament. It is only in Budapest that the two chambers of legislation and the central dome are connected, receive an external emphasis and form a neo-Gothic building. The spatial system, the arrangement of the blocks and the style of Parliament Building in Budapest rely on experiences of the construction of Parliaments in Europe.
and North America. It combines and summarizes a fifty-year development process.

As a result of its location, Parliament Building is a central, decisive component of the Budapest cityscape. It is not by chance that today it appears as a symbol both of Hungarian statehood and the Hungarian capital. The overall impression of the giant building – rising with its buttresses and external steps from the lower embankment – has become inseparable from River Danube, a part of which it majestically dominates. Ideologically and architecturally, the home of Hungarian parliamentarism counterbalances the neo-baroque building of the former royal castle, which sits on the other side of the river. On the Pest side, Parliament Building is surrounded on three sides by Kossuth Square, the venue of noted historical events. Statues of historical themes adorn the square.

INSIDE THE BUILDING

The ground plan of Parliament Building is characterized by symmetry and a clear-cut layout. The wings of the building embrace ten courtyards, all in different sizes, and the communication among the various parts is provided by a system of seemingly endless corridors.

The chambers of legislation are located on the first floor, along with other halls and offices of priority importance. The interior of these halls is of an especially high standard as they are richly adorned with works of art. As these halls were in part open to the public, they had a dual function: serve the legislature and illustrate Hungary’s wealth.

The ground plan of the main spaces of Parliament Building – similarly to the Houses of Parliament in London – forms a cross,
with a hall under the dome in the intersection. The southern part of the longitudinal axis comprises the premises of the Lower House, the northern part features the halls of the former Upper House, the short axis includes the former Hall of Delegations and the ministers’ studies, the grand staircase and a restaurant.

The middle part of the cross wing is occupied by the grand staircase. As the main halls of Parliament Building are located higher than what is customary in parliamentary construction, such an impressive staircase cannot be found in other Parliaments. Its ribbed vault apart, the grand staircase is not gothic, instead, it is reminiscent of baroque palaces. Unlike the monochrome exterior of the building, the grand staircase is highly colourful. The lower sidewalls of the staircase are covered with dark brown marble, the upper sidewalls with light brown marble, parts of the balustrades with yellow marble (all from Máriagyúd, southern Hungary), and the balusters are made of marble from Vaskoh (Vâșcău). Every effort was made to use domestic building materials and the products of Hungarian manufacturers. In case suitable materials were not available from Hungarian sources, they were imported. The pillars supporting the vault were made of yellow marble from Girolamo, the eight monolithic columns standing between them were made of reddish brown Swedish granite, and the banisters are carved of marble from the Karst Region (today in Slovenia).

Four coloured statues of pages, cast from zinc, stand at pillars of the hall. The pages hold the Hungarian coronation regalia in their hands. The vaults feature decorative painting in a Renaissance style, and flowers are drawn between grotesque motives. It is known from Steindl’s inaugural address at the Academy of Sciences that he intended to lend a national character to the building that way. Similar motifs appear in several places – all made by Róbert Scholcz, a noted painter of the era. A coloured glass
window was fitted at the top level of the staircase from the renowned workshop of Miksa Róth. Róth’s windows, some of them ornate, others simple, appear in several corridors and some of the halls.

One of the finest Hungarian painters of the era, Károly Lotz, who had already proven his talent by decorating the Opera House, painted the frescoes of the staircase. The ceiling of the staircase consists of three fields, where Lotz had to express in pictures two important ideas of the building’s art scheme: The Apotheosis of Hungary and The Apotheosis of Legislation. Between them he painted coats of arms of Hungary and its dominions, angels and the coronation regalia. Painted in tempera, the frescoes exude light lyricism. The figures are imaginary and are shown from a bottom view perspective.

Three arches connect the staircase and the Dome Hall, which is Parliament Building’s high point physically and spiritually. The impressive dome rests on sixteen massive pillars. Attached to them are bundles of columns, which in turn unfold into a fabulous pattern of star vault and lierne vault. Coloured zinc statues of respected Hungarian monarchs and statesmen adorn the pillars, thereby turning the Dome Hall into a national Pantheon. Their period apparel, weapons and majestic posture are similar to those of the statues on the exterior of the building. The gallery of statues starts opposite the staircase with Prince Árpád (9th century), and then proceeds in a chronological order to the right ending with Leopold II of Habsburg. The hall is the venue of festive events. Since 1 January 2000 – the one thousand years’ anniversary of the Hungarian Christian State – the Hungarian crown and the coronation regalia have been kept there.

The Dome Hall is flanked by the lounges of the two legislative chambers. The two lounges have a similar architectural style and
decoration. The barrel-vaulted spaces, and the fresco on the ceiling that evokes the sky, have a baroque atmosphere. There are statues representing various trades along the columns. Wearing medieval attire, the naturalistic figures are coloured ceramics, produced by the Zsolnay Porcelain Factory in Pécs.

The legislative chambers, the venue of the activities of the National Assembly, are located beyond the lounges. The dimensions of the two halls are identical, and the architectural design and decoration are much the same, but in certain details the former Upper House is more ornate. Two corners of the chambers are rounded because their ground plan follows the horse-shoe layout of the rows of benches. A combined framework placed on struts and well-known from the architecture of the late British Gothic style joins the traceries in the halls of the upstairs sections, and the coffered ceiling shows similarities with the world of renaissance. The wooden ceiling and the benches in the chambers were made by Endre Thék and the plant of Alajos Michl, using the best Slavonian oak. The chambers are not very large and they are partitioned which yield the additional benefit of good acoustics.

In the chamber of the former Upper House, behind the chairman’s pulpit, a row of painted shields of the Hungarian monarch families are fitted, and in the centre the shield of Hungary and its allied countries at the time is featured. Next to them on the two sides Mátyás Jantyik made wall paintings in different longitudinal fields. The scenes composed in a theatrical way, but very cleverly, emphasize the historical role of the nobility. The subject of the painting on the left-hand side is the *Proclamation of the Golden Bull of Hungary*, i.e. the scene in which King Andrew II issues in 1222 the statement which reinforces the privileges of the estates; the right-hand side picture shows the *Vitam et sanguinem* scene in
Bratislava, 1741, when the Hungarian nobilities offer their lives and blood to Queen Maria Theresia.

In the chamber of the Lower House, the same shields which featured in the Upper House are used behind the pulpit. On the two sides, the longish tempera wall paintings made by Zsigmond Vajda: Opening of Parliament Building in 1848 and the Crowning of Francis Joseph can be seen, recalling two important events of Hungarian history.

The so-called delegation corridor, which is wider and richer decorated than the other corridors is located in the east end of the cross wing. The one time studies of the ministers are accessible from here. Reference to this is made by the wall paintings of the corridor because the subjects are Going to war, Religion and culture, Law enforcement, Agriculture, Industry and Trade. In a creative way, the painter Andor Dudits shows in the picture well-composed scenes about the subject, instead of allegoric figures. In the Delegation hall accessible from the middle of the corridor, the MPs of the Vienna and Budapest Parliaments discussed matters of joint interest at the time of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. On the long side above the entrance, there is a huge and yet inert wall painting made by Andor Dudits: Franis Joseph’s sword stroke at the time of his crowning. This reminded people in the hall about a ceremonial event that took place at the time the dualist state was set up.

Accessible from the hall below the dome, in the direction of the riverside, there is a longitudinal restaurant or as better known the Hunters’ Hall. The speciality here is the number of wall paintings in many subjects and styles. The two shorter sides feature the tempera paintings of Aladár Körösfi-Kriesch. The subjects – as shown by the plaques below – are: Fishing in Lake Balaton in the 15th century and Bison hunting, Etele saves Buda but in a general
interpretation the two ancient activities of Hungarians, fishing and hunting, are depicted. The Art Nouveau paintings are full of motion and represent a colourful spot in the academic-historicism world of Parliament Building. On the side opposite the windows, some famous castles of historical Hungary (Vajdahunyad [Hunedoara], Árva [Oravský Podzámok], Visegrád, Trencsén [Trenčín], Klissza [Klis]) are shown in the paintings of Béla Spányi. These works of art had to be repainted because the original paintings were destroyed during the Second World War. On the ceiling, there are three illusionist allegoric paintings by Viktor Tardos-Krenner: Harvest, Abundance and Grape harvest, which refer to the function of the hall.

In the south end of the longitudinal wing, in the halls of the former Speaker of the House, there are several works of art worthy of attention. Perhaps the biggest painting in Parliament Building is placed on the long wall of the Prime Minister’s reception hall, the oil painting Conquest by Mihály Munkácsy. The painting shows the scene, in which Arpád and his escort receive the surrender Slavic envoys. In the former Speaker’s Office of the Lower House, wall paintings were put on the walls of the large hall in 1929. One of them shows János Hunyadi before the castle of Nándorfehérvár (today Belgrade) – this is why the name of the hall is Nándorfehérvár.

When leaving the colourful and gilded inner world of the upstairs section, which is richly decorated with wall paintings and statues, the yards designed with more simple materials offer a refreshing sight. The wall planes are made of light colour, moulded bricks. The crowns and inserts depict flowers and fruit grown in Hungary – sweetcorn, sunflower, tobacco, oak leaf and tulip, by which the architect intended to emphasize the national character. The ledges are closed by a frieze borrowed from the Gothic style.
of Venice and consisting of pointed elements. At certain places the frieze is supplemented by fantastic masks.

Because at the end of the Second World War the two-chamber parliamentary system was replaced by a single chamber one in Hungary, the functions of some inner spaces had changed. The chamber of the former Upper House is used for various meetings, and it is called the Congress Hall since 1945. Until recently, the suite of the President of the Republic was for a long time located at the southern end of the longitudinal wing. For that reason, the suite of the Speaker of the Lower House – today’s National Assembly – was transferred to where it is today: in the cross wing. In 2003 the President of the Republic and his aides moved to the Alexander Palace (Sándor-palota) on Castle Hill. The Alexander Palace is considered as a symbol of Hungarian statehood. In the northern end of the longitudinal wing, where the halls of the Upper House were located earlier, committee offices were set up.

Since – due to the need to speed up work – many elements on Parliament Building’s façade were carved of semi-hard and soft limestone, this material had started to crumble quickly after the commissioning of the building. The replacement of stone units had to be started already in 1924. The building had suffered war damage in 1944-45, but this was repaired in a few years, even if temporarily. In the early 1970s, a programme spanning many decades and aimed at a restoration involving the complete replacement of stones started. As a result of renovation and continuous maintenance, the interior of the building exudes its splendour of old.
Speaker of the National Assembly:

Dr. Katalin Szili

Deputy Speakers of the National Assembly:

László Mandur (MSZP)
Dr. János Áder (Fidesz)
Sándor Lezsák (Fidesz)
Péter Harrach (KDNP)
Dr. Gábor Világosi (SZDSZ)

Leaders of the parliamentary groups of the parties in Parliament:

Ildikó Lendvai (MSZP)
Dr. Tibor Navracsics (Fidesz)
Dr. Zsolt Semjén (KDNP)
Gábor Kuncze (SZDSZ)
Károly Herényi (MDF)

Chairpersons of the Standing Committees:

Dr. Dezső Avarkeszi (MSZP) Constitutional, Judicial and Standing Orders Committee
Dr. Mihály Kökény (MSZP) Committee on Health
Zoltán Balog (Fidesz) Committee on Human Rights, Minorities, Civil and Religious Affairs
Dr. Mátéyás Eörsi (SZDSZ) Committee on European Affairs
Gábor Simon (MSZP) Committee on Employment and Labour
László Puch (MSZP) Economic and Information Technology Committee
János Lázár (Fidesz) Defence and Law Enforcement Committee
Lajos Korózs (MSZP) Committee on Youth, Social and Family Affairs
Mihály Varga (Fidesz) Committee on Budget, Finance and Audit Office
Kálmán Katona (MDF) Committee on Environmental Protection
Dr. Pető Iván (SZDSZ) Committee on Culture and the Media
Zsolt Attila Németh (Fidesz) Foreign Affairs and Hungarian Minorities Abroad Committee
Dr. József Alajos Géczi (MSZP) Committee on Immunity, Incompatibility and Credentials
Sándor Font (Fidesz) Committee on Agriculture
Dr. István Simicskó (KDNP) Committee on National Security
Dr. Zoltán Szabó (MSZP) Committee on Education and Science
István Jauernik (MSZP) Local Government and Urban Development Committee
Erik Bánki (Fidesz) Committee on Sport and Tourism