

# A CLOSER LOOK AT THE SENATE



Senato della Repubblica



# The Senate of the Republic

The Senate of the Republic is one of the two Houses of the Italian Parliament. It was established by article 55 of the Constitution, which grants the Senate and Chamber of deputies equal powers, pursuant to the principle of perfect bicameralism adopted by the Constituent Assembly (1946-47). The two Houses collectively perform the legislative function; guide Government action – through the adoption or rejection of motions of confidence in the Government and the adoption of motions, resolutions and recommendations; scrutinise Government policies through inquiries, questions and motions. The Senate and the Chamber of deputies consist of 200 Senators and 400 Deputies respectively, elected by direct universal suffrage every five years. While performing their functions, Senators and Senate bodies are assisted by an administrative structure that fulfils its duties pursuant to the principle of independence and impartiality.

[www.senato.it/istituzione](http://www.senato.it/istituzione)



The Italian Constitution was promulgated on 27 December 1947 at Palazzo Giustiniani by Enrico De Nicola, interim Head of State during the transition period (from the Monarchy/Republic referendum on 2 June 1946, to the promulgation of the Constitution), who had established his residence here.

The Constitution came into force on 1 January 1948.

## Senators

Citizens aged at least 40 may be elected Senators, while all citizens over 18 years of age may vote for the Senate. The Senate is elected on a regional basis and consists of 200 elected Senators, plus former Presidents of the Republic (who are *ex officio* Life Senators) and Senators appointed for life by the President of the Republic from among citizens who have brought prestige to the country through their achievements in the social, scientific, artistic and literary fields (of these appointed Life Senators there can be no more than five at any one time). The Senate website provides statistical data on Senators (broken down into age, qualification, profession, etc.) and fact sheets on individual Senators giving information on offices held, Committees they are members of, activities carried out in the Senate.

[www.senato.it/senatori](http://www.senato.it/senatori)

## The President

The President of the Senate is elected at the first sitting of a new Senate. He or she represents the Senate and regulates the activities of all its bodies, ensuring that the Rules of procedure are complied with; chairs Senate sittings, guides debates and keeps order, assesses whether a legislative proposal is receivable, grants the right to speak, calls the votes, establishes the voting order and announces the results of votes. The President also oversees the duties assigned to Quaestors and Secretaries and ensures the proper functioning of the Administration. As the second highest-ranking Office of the Republic, the President of the Senate performs the functions of the President of the Republic in all cases in which the President cannot discharge them.

[www.senato.it/presidente](http://www.senato.it/presidente)

## Senate Bureau

At the start of a new parliamentary term, the Senate elects four Vice Presidents, three Quaestors and a number of Secretaries, who form the Senate Bureau together with the President of the Senate. The Bureau is vested with the topmost decision-making authority with respect to administrative and disciplinary matters. On the President's proposal, the Bureau appoints the Secretary-General, who oversees all Senate offices.

[www.senato.it/consigliopresidenza](http://www.senato.it/consigliopresidenza)

## The Senate Plenary

In parliamentary jargon, Plenary means the overall number of Senators gathered in a Senate sitting. The Plenary meets in the Chamber of Palazzo Madama, where Senators take their seats depending on the Parliamentary Group they are members of. On the Senate website it is possible to consult the agenda of the latest sitting, the *verbatim* reports, the statement closing the sitting of the Assembly and of its Committees, which sums up the major events, and the parliamentary business agenda.

[www.senato.it/assemblea](http://www.senato.it/assemblea)

## Committees

**Standing Committees** reproduce, on a smaller scale, the composition of the Plenary. Their members are designated by the Parliamentary Groups so as to reflect their size. There are ten Committees and each one holds specific jurisdiction over one or more sectors corresponding to the activities of one or more executive departments. In addition to Standing Committees, the Senate may establish temporary **Special Committees** on very complex or technical issues and **Committees of Enquiry**, to investigate matters of public interest. Should both Houses set up an enquiry into the same matter, a Joint Committee of Enquiry will be established, including both Senators and Deputies. There are also **Joint Committees**, that have advisory, supervisory, policy-setting and oversight functions. Alongside Committees, Senate

Rules provide for Committees vested with non-legislative but technical functions, and a **Committee on Legislation**, to assess the impact and quality of legislation.

[www.senato.it/commissioni](http://www.senato.it/commissioni)

## Parliamentary Groups

Parliamentary Groups gather Senators according to their political allegiance and represent the parliamentary structure of political parties who participated in the latest political elections. Within three days from the first sitting, each Senator shall notify the Group they intend to join. Life Senators may decide not to join any Group. Each Group must consist at least of six Senators and elects its own Leader.

[www.senato.it/gruppi](http://www.senato.it/gruppi)

## Conference of Group Leaders

It is formed by the Leaders of the Parliamentary Groups and is chaired by the President of the Senate, attended by Senate Vice Presidents and a member of the Government. Its tasks include the planning of Plenary sittings and the definition of each Group's total speaking time per agenda item and the date of the final vote.

[www.senato.it/capigruppo](http://www.senato.it/capigruppo)

## Joint sitting of the Parliament

Article 55(2) of the Constitution establishes that Parliament should gather in a joint sitting, chaired by the President of the Chamber of Deputies (article 63), under the following circumstances:

- the election (article 83), impeachment (article 90(2)), oath of allegiance (article 91) of the President of the Republic;
- the election of one third of the members of the High Council of the Judiciary (article 104(4));
- the election of one third of the judges of the Constitutional Court and the drafting of the list of ordinary members who join the Constitutional Court in impeachments against the President of the Republic (article 135(1) and (7)).

It is primarily the *verbatim* report that ensures the publicity of parliamentary proceedings. Since 1881 to present days, the Senate has been using a particular stenotype system, based on the “Michela” drafting machine, whose different versions evolved in the years. Nowadays, technological developments enabled the Senate to study new systems for debates transcriptions.

In the image, the first “Michela” machine model.

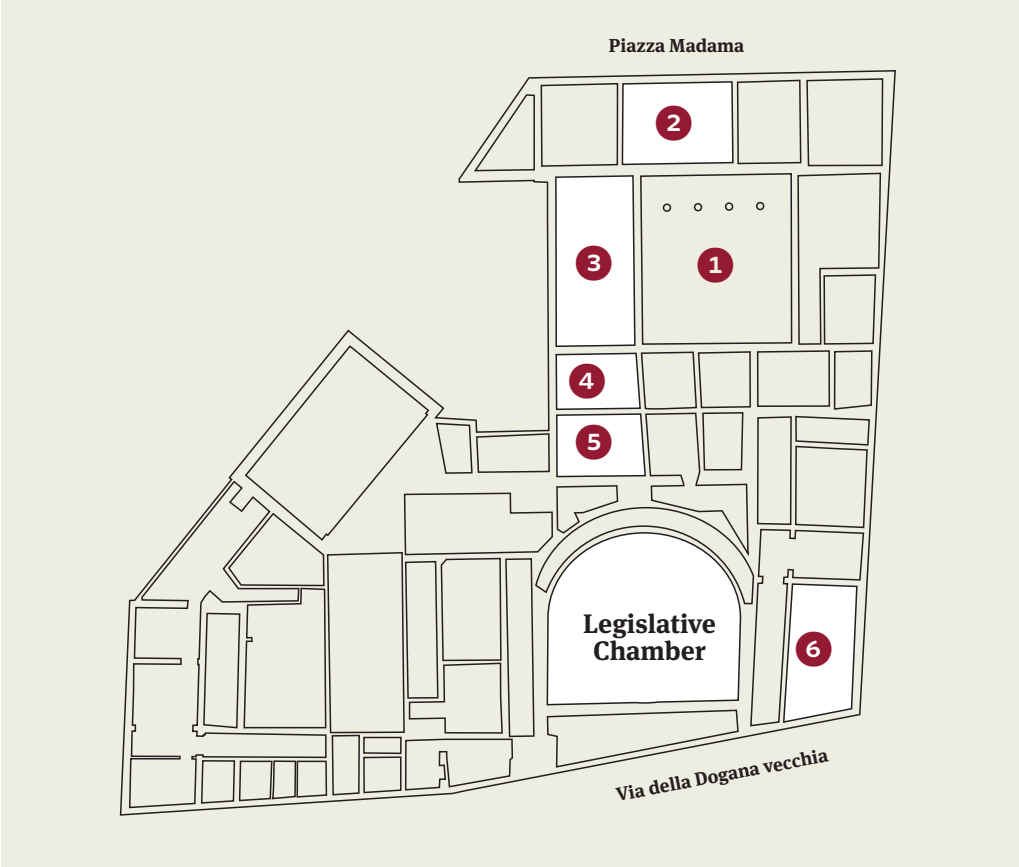




# Palazzo Madama and its halls

The oldest part of **Palazzo Madama** was built during the medieval era, atop the ruins of the ancient thermal baths of Nero and Alexander Severus, and reached its zenith starting from the early 16th century, when it became the prestigious Roman residence of the Medici family. It owes its name to Margaret of Austria, known as “The Madam”, wife of Alessandro de’ Medici, who enjoyed long stays here in the 16th century. Starting from the mid-18th century the Palace’s purpose of use changed as

it became a public building of the Papal States: it hosted the headquarters of the Papal Mail, the Police and the Treasury. Starting in 1850, lotto numbers were drawn from Palazzo Madama. When Rome became the capital of the Kingdom of Italy, Palazzo Madama was selected – from among a pool of stately homes – to become the seat of the Senate. A few months later, on 28 November 1871, the first sitting was held.  
[www.senato.it/palazzomadama](http://www.senato.it/palazzomadama)



## 1 Main Courtyard



This is the main entrance to Palazzo Madama. It features a rectangular shape and Renaissance architecture; over time it underwent some renovations, which however did not change its original layout. The central basin hosts a statue by Emilio Greco, installed in 1972.

## 2 Sala Maccari



The Maccari Hall is named after Cesare Maccari, who finished frescoing it in 1888. Five famous events of Roman Senate history are depicted on its walls, symbolising Senators’ virtues: keeping one’s word, public speaking, honesty, courage, eloquence. At the centre of the ceiling there is a roundel, a symbolic representation of a triumphant Italy, bearing the caption “You are free. Be great”. The roundel is surrounded by eight medallions showing female figures, representing eight Italian cities, and four groups of cherubs, representing arts and sciences. The coat of arms of the House of Savoy (the former kings of Italy) are in the four corners, and a quote by Francesco Guicciardini and one by Niccolò Machiavelli are to be seen on the frieze.

## 3 Sala Garibaldi



The Garibaldi Hall owes its name to the presence of a bust of Giuseppe Garibaldi, the “Hero of Two Worlds”. This is a large hall, where Senators usually meet during breaks. It was created following the demolition of a partition wall at the beginning of the 20th century. The paintings here do not follow one another in a consistent way, since they were originally intended for two separate rooms which, as a number of details suggest, had been painted by two different artists.

## 4 Sala del Risorgimento



The Risorgimento Hall hosts busts and portraits of some of the foremost figures of the *Risorgimento*, alternating exponents of the democratic-republican area and representatives of the liberal constitutionalism that characterised the Kingdom of Sardinia (later of Italy) in the mid-1800s. The 17th-century wooden ceiling is coffered, decorated and gilded. The frieze celebrates Pope Clement VII, an influential member of the Medici family.

## 5 Sala dello Struzzo



This hall boasts a beautiful 16-th century coffered ceiling featuring painted and gilded stuccos; at its centre is an ostrich (in italian: *struzzo*), with a crown on its head and the emblem of the house of Medici tied with a ribbon around its neck. Some think that the figure refers to Margaret of Austria’s lineage, with a pun based on the french words for Austria (*Autriche*) and ostrich (*autruche*), while others claim that it symbolises justice and the ability to tackle difficulties.

## 6 Sala Pannini

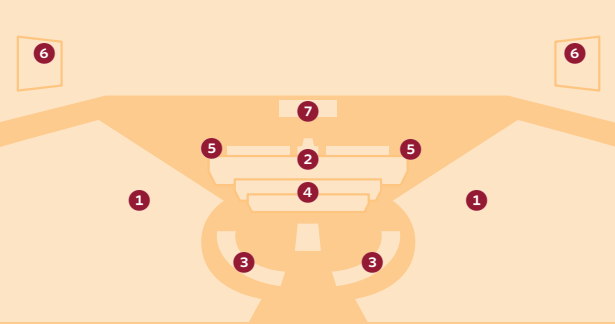


The Pannini Hall hosts the meetings of the Senate Bureau and of the Conference of Parliamentary Group Leaders. It is named after the author of the fresco decorating its ceiling – a work by Giovanni Paolo Pannini (1691-1765). The fresco had originally been painted at Palazzo Bacheloni in 1725-26 and was then relocated to Palazzo Madama when that building was demolished, as provided for under the 1926 city development plan.



# The Legislative Chamber

The Chamber stands where the Papal Mail courtyard used to be and was designed by Luigi Gabet. The inaugural sitting was held on 28 November 1871. Around the 1930s, the galleries of Deputies and Diplomats, which were supported by scaffoldings that rested on the floor, were replaced with cantilevered galleries, placed higher up. Other changes were made to the middle corridor, in order to increase the number of seats. The current appearance is substantially unchanged compared to the original, both in terms of structure and decoration. The ceiling, a work by Fumanti, Nava, Bruschi, Mei, Barilli and Gaj, is decorated with tempera on canvas mounted on a wooden structure, and features symbolic representations of Fortitude, Justice, Concord and Law. Two plaques are to be found above the President's bench. One of them quotes an excerpt from Victor Emmanuel II's address to the Chamber of Deputies on 27 November 1871, while the other recalls 2 June 1946, the day of the Monarchy/Republic referendum – when Italy chose to become a Republic. The Plenary is held here. Senators take their seats based on the Parliamentary Group they belong to, from the left to the right of the President's bench. Senators and Government representatives only (as well as Senate staff members) may enter the Senate Plenary floor. Law enforcement officers may not enter the chamber, unless the President orders so and only once the sitting has either ended or been suspended. It is possible to follow a sitting from the public galleries. Article 64 of the Constitution provides for the openness of parliamentary business: compliance with this principle is ensured by several instruments that allow everyone to follow plenary debates, chief among which is the *verbatim* report. Since 1881 to present days, at the Senate the verbatim report has been realized by a particular stenotype system, based on the "Michela" drafting machine. Thanks to recent technological developments, new systems for debates transcriptions are now being studied.



- 1 Seats assigned to the Senators**  
Each Senator is assigned a seat, from which it is possible to take the floor and vote. The political right and left are identified from the President's point of view.
- 2 President's bench**  
The President sits at the centre; he or she represents the Senate and regulates the activities of all its bodies, making sure the Rules of the Senate are complied with. The Secretaries sit to the President's right. Their duties include the following: overseeing the drafting of the minutes, keeping note of members scheduled to speak and acknowledging voting results. The Secretary General and the Senate officials assisting the President during the sitting sit to the President's left.
- 3 Committees bench**  
Committee rapporteurs reporting to the Senate sit here.
- 4 Government benches**  
The Ministers, with the President of the Council of Ministers in the middle, sit in the row just below the President's bench. Junior Ministers sit in the row further down.
- 5 General service staff**  
They assist the Senators during the sitting and, when the President so requests, perform security and representation duties.
- 6 Electronic boards**  
The boards are turned on during the electronic voting sessions. Votes cast are displayed through different colour lights: green for the ayes, red for the nays, white for abstention, yellow for any vote in a secret ballot, with each light corresponding to a Senator's seat.
- 7 Voting result board**  
It shows the outcome of the electronic voting session, as announced by the President.





The Senate is open to all citizens who wish to either visit it or follow a plenary sitting. Those who cannot travel to Rome may visit the Senate buildings through our virtual tours and may follow Senate sittings and cultural initiatives via WebTV, the Senate satellite, and YouTube channels.

Particular attention is given to young people and schoolchildren: every year, the Senate offers initiatives and projects aimed at making its law-making mechanisms more comprehensible and at raising awareness about the values underpinning our Constitution.

Visit Palazzo Madama  
[www.senato.it/visita](http://www.senato.it/visita)



Follow the sittings  
from the Senate galleries  
[www.senato.it/tribuneseduta](http://www.senato.it/tribuneseduta)



The Plenary's verbatim reports  
[www.senato.it/resoconti](http://www.senato.it/resoconti)



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