



SENAT RP

NOTES ON THE SENATE

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The Senate Debating Chamber

When the senators elected to the Senate in 1989 in the first free elections for fifty years arrived in parliament, they had to be provided with somewhere to do their work. They were given the east wing of the Sejm complex designed by Professor Bohdan Pniewski in the early fifties. It did not have a large enough hall where the Senate could hold plenary sittings, so the Senate met in alternation with the Sejm in the Sejm's debating chamber, and later – for more than eighteen months – in the Hall of Columns in the Sejm building.

At the beginning of 1990, the architects Andrzej and Barbara Kaliszewski and Bohdan Napieralski redesigned the first floor of the Senate building. The project took 14 months to complete. The external elevations of the building remained the same, and the architects took the view that the new interior must not clash with the existing style. They decided to keep to the spirit of Bohdan Pniewski's design.

The Senate's present debating chamber was created by joining three conference rooms, thus obtaining an area of 220 square metres. It was not an easy task to fit a chairman's table, a rostrum, 100 amphitheatre seats for the senators, and around 40 places for people taking part in the deliberations as guests or for various official reasons into such a confined space. The chamber's designation created additional problems, given the shortage of space. A new ceiling with semicircular relief moulding had to be constructed, to neutralize the dimensions of the rectangular chamber, which was twice as long as it was broad. Most of the wiring for the lighting, air-conditioning and so on was concealed behind



General view of the Senate Chamber, 2005

(Fot. K. Wiśniewska)



Hall and Spiral Staircase

(Fot. Senate Archives)

the false ceiling. Fire regulations demanded a second escape route, so an extra staircase was installed.

The colour scheme harmonizes with Professor Pniewski's, used in all the Sejm interiors, with its dominant combination of white, black and grey. There are white volutes of Carrera marble at the entrance to the chamber, similar to the marble used by Pniewski. Its specially designed furniture is upholstered in grey material.

The Senators sit facing an entire wall of huge windows filled with the green of the old trees on the slope down to the Vistula River. During debates, however, the slate-blue curtains with their undulating pattern of metal stripes have to be drawn. It would be hard for Senators to sit for hours with the light in their eyes as they watched the rostrum and the chairman's table in front of the windows. Artificial light is also needed, because of the television cameras. Four mirrors with silvery candelabras make the chamber look

wider, and add an aesthetic touch. The mirrors are in fact panes of glass, behind which the technical services work, making sound recordings and operating the hall's microphone and lighting systems.

Above the chairman's table against the background of a curtain hangs the Polish emblem and the Marshal's staff, which was designed by the architects for the first democratically elected chamber and made as a gift for it by the Artistic Craftsmen's Guild. The Marshal chairing the debate sits at the table together with the Senate secretaries assisting him, who keep a list of those taking the floor and make a written record of the proceedings. Below the chairman's table and the rostrum, there is a table for Senate Chancellery employees. This is where the shorthand writers, and Legislative Office and Plenary Sitings Unit employees work, and where Information Technology Unit staff look after the electronic voting system.

The small size of the interior made it necessary to limit the number of seats reserved for members of the government, experts, journalists and the public. They have a dozen or so chairs in the corners of the room opposite the presidium. There is a special place for the President, with the state flag and a kilim bearing an embroidered silver eagle copied from the pre-war standard of the president of the Polish Republic hanging above it.

Every senator has his own seat, with its brass nameplate. Each desk has a microphone, enabling senators to ask brief questions or take the floor without leaving their places.

The voting system was bought from Philips in the Netherlands.

Each senator has his own voting card. If he inserts it in a slot in his desk, it operates the voting system. Buttons correspond to the various voting options: for, against or abstention. Thanks to this electronic system, it is not necessary to count a quorum, because the number of senators present is always known.

The voting results appear on two illuminated electronic boards above the doors. Besides giving the overall result, a simultaneous computer print-out contains a list of names and tells how individual senators voted. There are lists of names and voting results for all votes during one sitting in the "Shorthand Report" published after the deliberations. Thus, the voting system is name-based which represents a step forward in the clarity of the debates.

The area around the debating chamber has also been partially renovated. The hall, with its very effective spiral staircase designed by Professor Bohdan Pniewski, remains the same. It now acts as a lobby during breaks in debates, as well as being a thoroughfare.

On the right-hand side of the hall, we find the Senate Marshal's quarters, his secretariat and the office of the head of secretariat. There is a large reception room adjoining the debating chamber, which houses the painting of Teodor Axentowicz "the Polish Legation and Walezjusz". On the left-hand side of the hall is a foyer with armchairs. During breaks in debates, the senators can relax here, have a coffee, discuss issues, and meet journalists. Portraits of all the Senate Marshals since 1922 hang on the foyer walls.

A new staircase leads down from the foyer, through rooms used by Legislative Office experts and other service staff, to the Senate's Chancellery offices on the lower floors of the building.

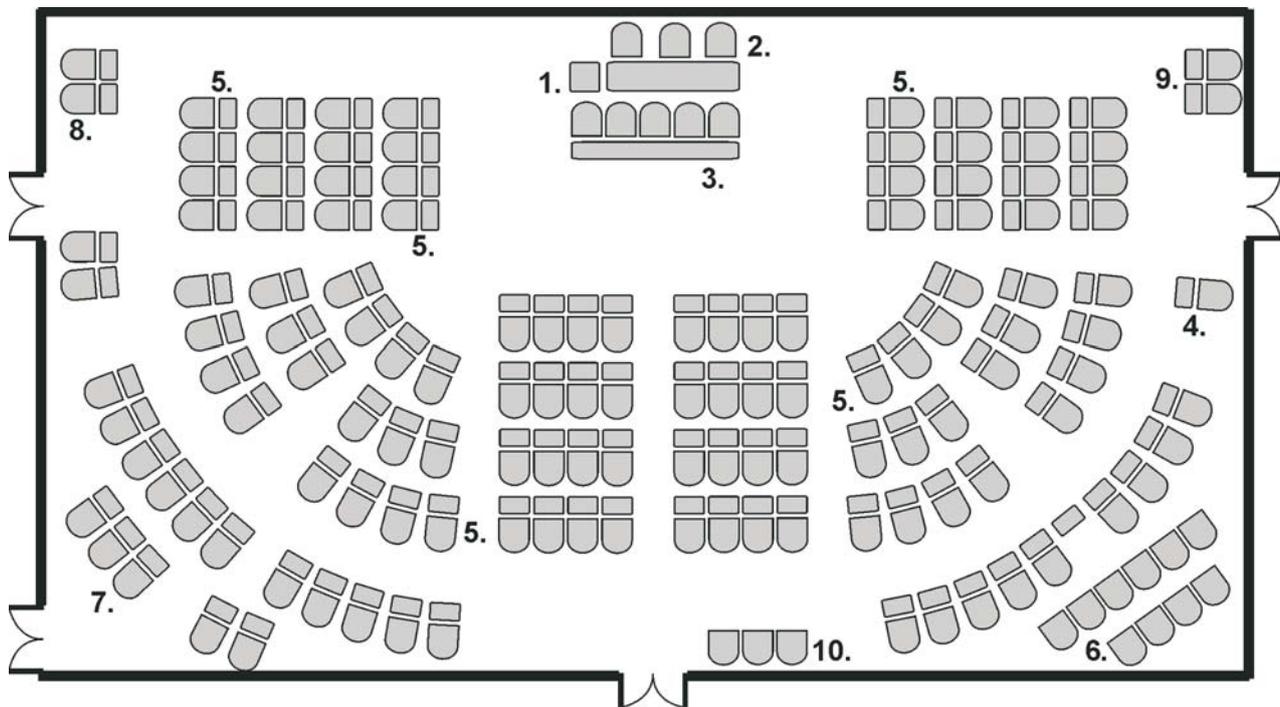


Voting cards

(Fot. K. Wiśniewska)

*Dorota Mycielska, September 1997
with later amendments, January 2006*

Plan of the Senate Debating Chamber



1. *Rostrum*
2. *Presidium*
3. *Secretariat*
4. *Presidential chair*
5. *Senators' seats*
6. *Seats for government and guests*
7. *Press and public seats*
8. *Senate Chancery's Legislative Office*
9. *Senate Chancery staff*
10. *Seats for Head of Senate Chancery and office heads*