

The House of Representatives Political control: Interpellations

What is interpellation?

Interpellation is a means of parliamentary control allowing a member of the House to ask one or more federal ministers to account for a political act, a given situation, or general or specific aspects of government policy.

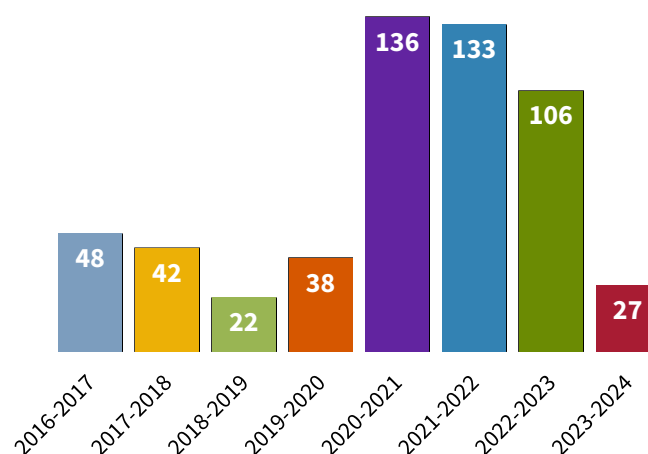
At the end of interpellations motions may be submitted calling into question the responsibility of the government or a member of the government, or making a recommendation to the government. Ministers may only be questioned on their policy and not on their intentions.

The right to interpellate members of the federal government is reserved to members of the House. Only the House is competent for the political control of the federal government.

The right to interpellate is not expressly provided by the Constitution. Its foundation is contained in the constitutional principle of ministerial accountability to the House.

Why interpellate?

The members of the House interpellate in order to raise an important problem. Current affairs, both domestic and international, may be the subject of interpellations.



What is the procedure?

The procedure is contained in the Standing Orders of the House of Representatives.

» Submission

A member who wishes to interpellate the government makes it known in writing to the President of the House. The President reads out this written declaration in the plenary meet-

01 Interpellation et question jointes de

- Reccino Van Lommel à Pierre-Yves Dermagne (VPM Économie et Travail) sur “La filtration illégale d’eau minérale” (55000475I)
- Anneleen Van Bossuyt à Pierre-Yves Dermagne (VPM Économie et Travail) sur “Les pratiques trompeuses concernant l’eau minérale” (55041218C)

01.01 **Reccino Van Lommel** (VB): Un énorme scandale a éclaté en France ces dernières semaines. La société française Alma, distributeur des marques Perrier et Vittel, entre autres, a vendu de l’eau filtrée sous l’appellation d’eau minérale naturelle ou d’eau de source, ce qui est strictement interdit. En outre, il s’agit d’une forme de tromperie à l’égard des consommateurs. Certaines installations de filtrage ayant été dissimulées, on peut également parler de tromperie à l’égard des contrôleurs. Les faits ont seulement été mis en lumière lorsqu’un travailleur a alerté les autorités et a tiré la sonnette d’alarme. Entre-temps, Nestlé a également admis avoir filtré illégalement de l’eau en 2021. La société avance plusieurs motifs environnementaux pour se dédouaner. Néanmoins, l’eau filtrée a été vendue comme étant de l’eau minérale.

ing. The interpellant then draws up a memo for the President of the House in which he sets out the purpose of his interpellation as well as the facts on which the explanations are requested. The Secretary general of the House (also called the Clerk of the House) forwards this memo to the minister so that he can prepare his reply.

» Admissibility

The President of the House rules on the admissibility of an interpellation. The President can turn an interpellation into an oral question on advice of the Conference of presidents.

» Referral

- In public committee meetings
The interpellation is generally held in public committee meetings
- In plenary session
The Conference of presidents may however decide that an interpellation relating to a matter of a general interest or to a special policy will be held in the plenary session.

» Discussion

The procedure is identical for interpellations conducted in public committee meetings and in the plenary sessions.

The interpellant first of all takes the floor for a maximum of ten minutes. Then any other members can interpellate on the same subject. Oral questions can be added. The speaking time of the other interpellants and questioners is limited to five minutes. When the importance of an interpellation justifies it, the Conference of presidents may, however, decide to extend the speaking time. The minister then replies to the questions. The interpellant (or interpellants if several members ask questions on the same subject) may then take the floor for a reply.

» Motions

- At the end of the discussion when all points of view have been set out, motions may be submitted. There are different types of motion:
- A simple motion: this motion is aimed at going back to the agenda (i.e. simply continuing with the proceedings). It has priority over all other motions. Its adoption leads to the other motions being cancelled.
- A motion of constructive disapproval: with this motion the House withdraws its confidence in the government and simultaneously proposes to the King the appointment of a successor to the Prime Minister.
- A motion of disapproval: by this motion the House withdraws its confidence in a minister or the government (but does not simultaneously propose to the King the appointment of a successor to the Prime Minister).
- A motion of recommendation: this is a reasoned motion by which the House does not decide on its confidence in or disapproval of the government or minister but suggests political acts to be conducted by the government.

» Vote

The Standing orders stipulate that the motions are not voted on immediately but the votes take place in the week following the interpellation. This period of reflection allows the authors to amend the motions.

In general an ordinary motion is adopted, supported by the majority parties.

Where do you find the interpellations?

The interpellations and the government answers are published in the integral report (verbatim account of the Assembly proceedings in the language of the speaker) and in the summary report of the public committee meetings and the plenary sessions. These reports can be consulted on the House's website.

Une motion de recommandation a été déposée par M. Reccino Van Lommel et est libellée comme suit:

“La Chambre,

ayant entendu l'interpellation de M. Reccino Van Lommel et la réponse du vice-premier ministre et ministre de l'Économie et du Travail, demande au gouvernement

- de mobiliser toutes les autorités compétentes pour examiner les effets de ces pratiques déloyales dans notre pays;

- de prendre les initiatives nécessaires pour la protection des consommateurs;

- de vérifier si des pratiques analogues ont également cours dans des entreprises belges qui produisent de l'eau minérale.”

Committee on Economy and Consumer Protection - 07/02/2024