

"Chamber" – What is that?

Chambers are organisations (corporations) established by the legislator to protect the interests of certain members of the population.

Chambers are different to associations in the fact that their legal existence finds on a specific law (e.g., law on the chambers of commerce) and not on a private agreement that operates within the framework of provisions of the association law. This law defines the tasks and organs of the chamber in its broad outlines, while activities of associations are governed by their statutes, meaning by agreements of the members themselves. A group of people belongs to chambers by law, it does not need a declaration for them to be part of the chamber. In comparison, interested people are free to join the association or withdraw from it.

In conclusion, chambers show a public character, they are bodies of public law with specific legal rights and obligations. In contrast to chambers, associations can only represent their members but never the entire profession.

Chambers are self-governing, the national legislator transfers a large part of public administration to them.

If there were no chambers, their part of public administration would be provided by national public authorities which lack the direct contact with those people, who belong to certain chambers. However, chambers carry out the tasks assigned to them by letting members elect their organs, who also build a part of the chamber. This is to make sure, that the chambers respect intentions of their members when making important decisions.

The main characteristic feature of chamber's self-government are elections, which are based on the democratic principle. The state is only allowed to control whether the organs do their job and stick to the law.

The self-governing organs are allowed to make decisions their members need to respect, known as statutes.

An important task of professional self-government is to delegate experts to commissions and advisory boards. By providing expertise and experience from business life, the authorities can be advised in a practical manner. Often, this know-how is also very helpful in the context of so-called assessment procedures when creating new laws and regulations.

In Austria, we have a number of different chambers, e.g., the chambers of agriculture, which was created to protect interests of the farming community, chambers of labour, to protect interests of employed people and more.

The economic chambers (Austria Economic Chamber + 9 chambers in each of the nine states) were created to protect the interests of self-employed people in trade, industry, commerce, banking and insurance, transport and tourism.

As economic chambers are bodies of public law, they can demand federal, state and municipal authorities to provide them with the necessary information and to assist them in fulfilling their tasks. They can demand the same from other statutory interest groups (e.g. chambers of labour), from social security institutions but also from their own members. The economic chambers are obliged to behave in the same way towards authorities and bodies as well as towards their own members.