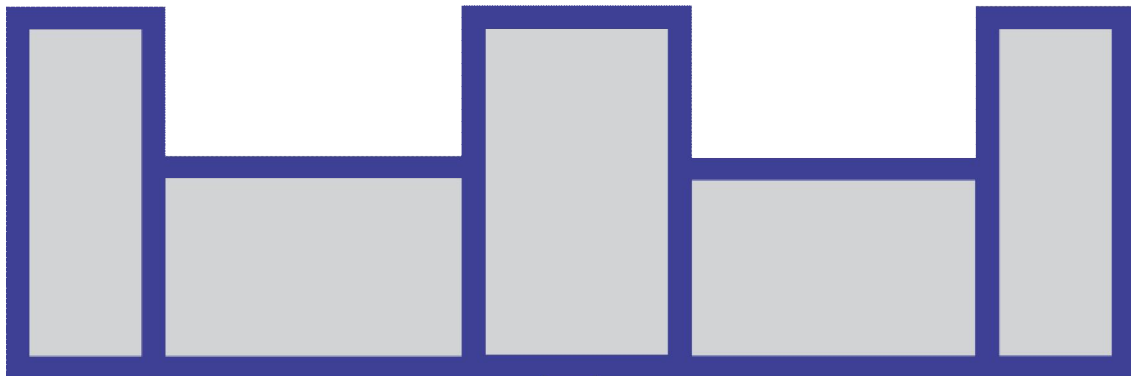


FIFTH MONITORING REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF THE DEBATE IN THE PARLIAMENT



PARLIAMENT WATCH

**Strengthening Political Debate
and Deliberative Discourse**

DECEMBER 2014

The Project is financed by the European Union



Fifth Monitoring Report on the Quality of the Debate in the Parliament (December)

The Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis” – Skopje (IDSCS) and the Institute for Central-Eastern and Balkan Europe (IECOB) are monitoring the quality of the debates in the Assembly. The monitoring started in June 2014 and it is part of the project “Parliament Watch! Strengthening the political debate and deliberative discourse” that is financially supported by the European Union. During the monitoring period, 10 monthly reports with the main findings will be published.

Through applying the ‘Discourse Quality Index’¹ speech acts in the plenary and in the sessions of eight parliamentary committees- selected according their importance for the political debate and political culture in the country- are assessed following pre-selected parameters.

The main goal of this monitoring is to reach to empirical conclusions about the level and quality of argumentation of the parliamentary debates and to measure to what extent different opinions and standpoints influence and contribute to law-making.

Simultaneously within the project, monitoring of 10 national media is conducted, in order to see the extent at which the general public is informed about the arguments placed forward by the Members of the Parliament (MPs).

Through monthly reports the public is informed on the key-findings from the monitoring of the debate in the Parliament and the media reporting.

A. SUMMARY

The MPs increased their interaction, although without convincing themselves in the legitimacy of their arguments, thus remaining in their “trenches”.

The key-findings from the Fifth Monitoring Report (monitoring period 1-31 December, total 11 sessions) are that the discussion on the legal proposals remains weak, with somewhat bigger interaction among the MPs compared to the previous monitoring periods (19 June-1 August, 25 August- 30 September and November).

¹Steiner J., Bächtiger A., Spörndli M., Steenbergen M.R, *Deliberative Politics in Action: Analyzing Parliamentary Discourse*

The original Discourse Quality Index (DQI) is created by a group of eminent world theoreticians of the deliberative democracy. The DQI was used for similar empirical researches in several national parliaments: Germany, USA, and Switzerland; as well as the European Parliament.



The increased

interaction can be seen through the increased replies and counter-replies, especially on several topics like: the parliamentary questions, the amendments to the Law on High Education, the Law on Spatial and Urban Planning and the Law on Administrative Officials.

The participants in the monitored sessions yet again failed to show any interest and readiness for changing their views for the sake of a better quality arguments in the debate, resulting with none of the MPs changing their views. For most of the part, the speakers totally disregarded the arguments of the opposing MPs.

From the beginning of the monitoring up till now, the MPs had the least of arguments referring to the public good, whereas they mostly referred to abstract principles.

In December, the Opposition has increased their share in the discussions, reaching 21% compared to last month. As in October, this is the highest level of participation marked in the monitored sessions up till now.

In most of the discussions, the MPs elaborated their views with two or more arguments. In addition, the percent of discussions with one argument increased, while the number of discussions with no arguments at all decreased compared to the previous months.

Most of the items on the agenda went with small, one-sided or no discussion at all.

As a consequence, the public was once again deprived of a quality debate for part of the legal decisions. At the same time, the opportunity for testing the validity of the expressed arguments of the MPs and the chance for debating or amending them, leading to adopting better quality laws for the public benefit and interest, was missed.

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The 'Discourse Quality Index' (DQI) enables each speech act to be coded by several main characteristics:

- Level of argumentation
- Level of respect towards other MPs and theirs arguments
- Readiness and openness for changing the positions under the force of better arguments brought in the debate
- Content of justification or to whose benefits and costs refers the speaker
- Interruption or constraints towards speakers
- Use of inappropriate or abusive speech

The monitoring focused on the following working bodies of the Assembly:

- Plenary sessions



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- Committee on constitutional issues
 - Finances and budget committee
 - Committee on the political system and inter-ethnic relations
 - Committee on election and appointment issues
 - Committee on European affairs
 - Standing inquiry committee for protection of civil freedoms and rights
 - Legislative committee
 - Committee on local self-government

C. POLITICAL CONTEXT

According to the Constitution, the Parliament holds the legislative power and it is composed of 123 seats. Elected through a proportional electoral system, MPs held a mandate of 4 years. At the last early parliamentary elections conducted in April 2014, Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) won 61 mandates, and formed the government the Democratic Union (DPA) that won 19 seats. Citizens Option for Macedonia (GROM) and the National Democratic Rebirth (NDP), won one mandate each. NDP MP, accepted the mandate despite the party's decision to boycott the Assembly and joined the parliamentary group of DUI which now has 20 MPs.

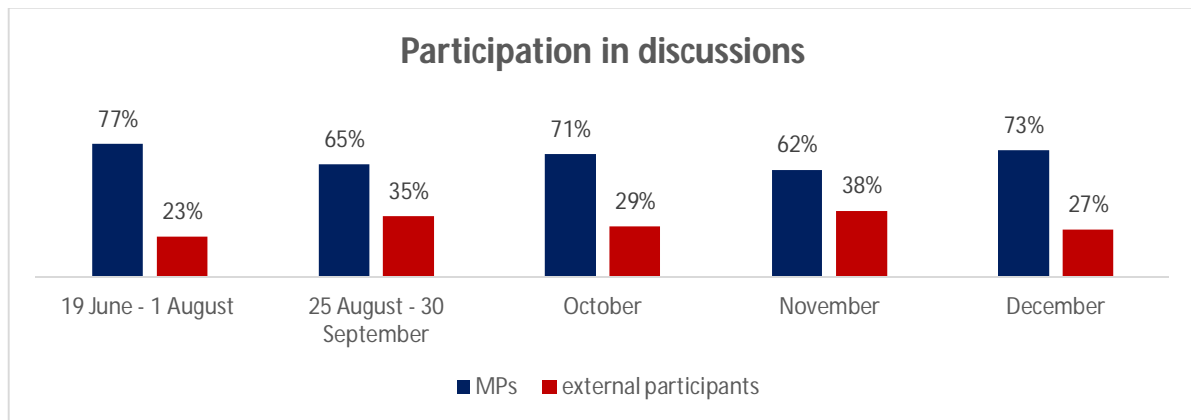
Since the beginning of the monitoring and until the publication of this report, most of the MPs from the main opposition coalition led by the party Social-Democratic Union for Macedonia (SDSM) that won 34 mandates on the elections boycotted the work of the Assembly. In December in the Assembly the opposition block was composed of total of 10 MPs. Seven of these MPs are from the Democratic Party of Albanians and three MPs from the opposition coalition led by SDSM which decided to accept the mandates beside the coalition decision to boycott the Assembly. The parliamentary majority in November began the procedure for revoking the mandates of 31 opposition MPs that are boycotting. The procedure was not finished due to the fact that on 26th December the ruling party didn't gather majority of 82 MPs needed to revoke the mandates.

D. FINDINGS FROM THE MONITORING



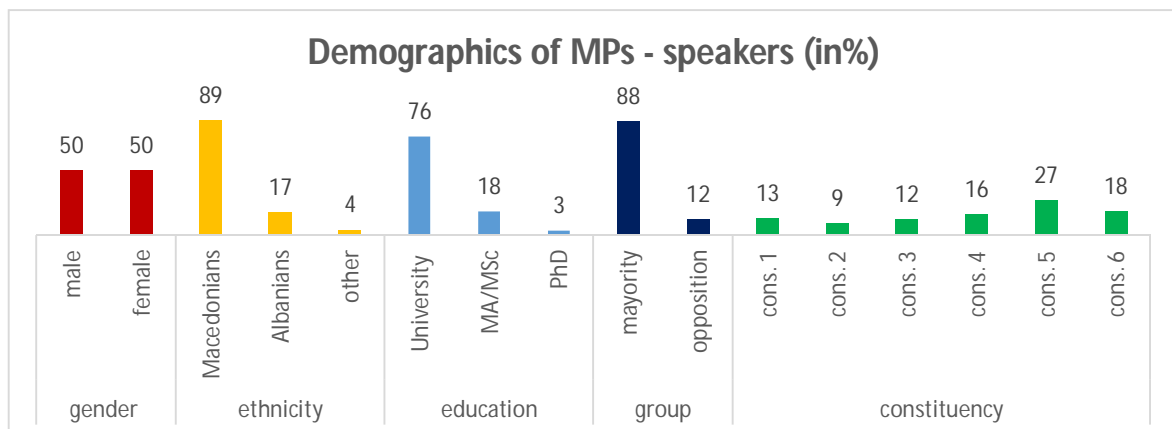
The report covers the debate in the Parliament in the period from 1 to 31 December. It includes a total of 396 speech acts of participants on 11 parliamentary sessions, of which 7 are plenary and 4 sessions of parliamentary committees. The latter divide in two sessions of the Committee on the political system and inter-ethnic relations, Legislative committee and Committee on election and appointment issues.

From the recalled speeches, 288 belong to MPs and 108 to outside participants in the work of the Assembly such as government ministers, representatives of ministries, state and public institutions. Participants commented on 81 topics chosen from the agenda of the Assembly. The report refers only to speech acts delivered by MPs.



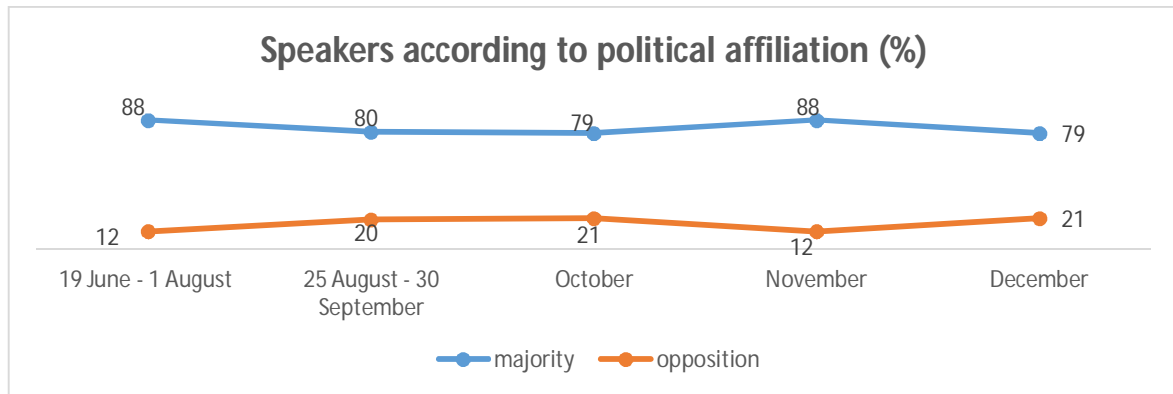
The demographic characteristics of the speakers in December are the following:

- Sex: 50% male, 50% female
- Ethnicity: 89% Macedonians, 8% Albanians, 3% other
- Education: 67% University, 22% MA/MSc, 11% PhD
- The MPs elected from Constituency 5 were the most active in December, and those elected from Constituency 1 were the least active.

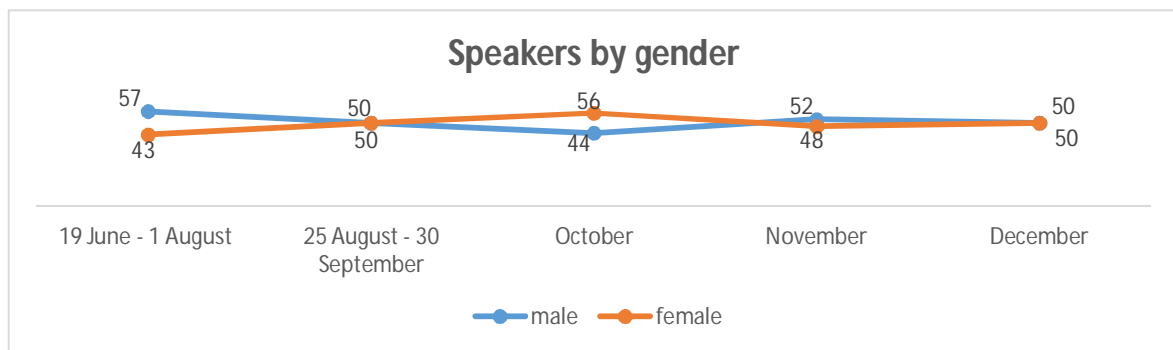




Opposition MPs have increased their participation in the discussions up to 21%, which is more compared to November. This percent is the same as in November, and at the same time the highest share of the Opposition in the discussions, from the beginning of the monitoring.



On the monitored sessions from December, female MPs and male MPs have an equal percent of discussions – 50%. Having in mind that the female MPs make 35% from the total number of MPs in the current composition of the Government, it seems that women took the floor more than men.



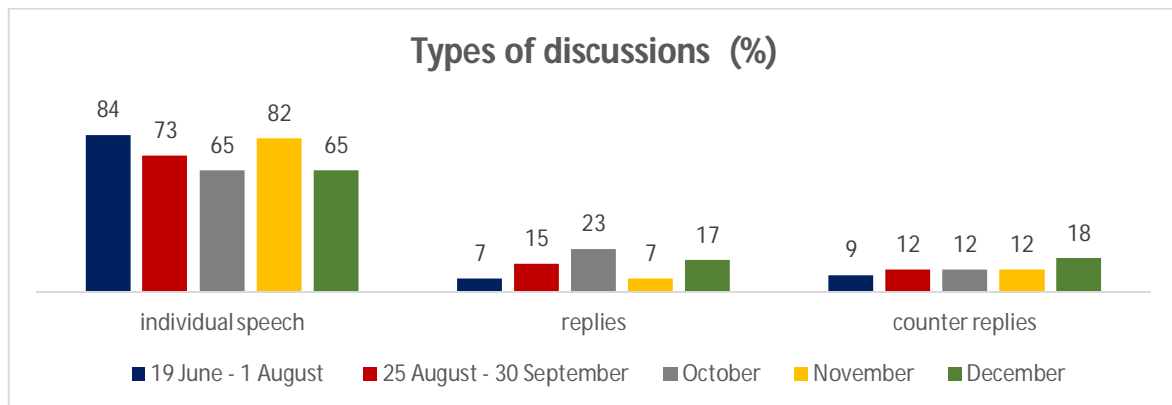
According to the share, if the total time of discussions is divided with the total number of accepted mandates by the MPs, it appears that every MP from the majority has averagely debated 11, while every MP from the Opposition 18 minutes. If the total time is divided only with those MPs who took the floor on the monitored sessions, it appears that each speech both from the Opposition and the parliamentary majority MPs averagely lasts 4 minutes.



I. TYPE OF SPEECHES AND INTERACTION

The monitoring in December, apart from the regular plenary sessions and the parliamentary committee sessions, also enclosed one plenary session on parliamentary questions and one committee session, representing a public debate, where most of the participants were not MPs, but external members among whom experts and representatives of the judicial and executive power.

The monitoring in December showed a rise in the interaction between the MPs, seen through the number of replies and counter-replies between the members of the debates, compared to last month. In addition, the questions and answers between the MPs and the ministers on the plenary session dedicated to parliamentary questions, have also been noted as replies and counter-replies. From the monitored sessions 65% fall on individual speeches, 17% on replies, while 18% on counter-replies in the discussions. This shows that the MPs have increased their replies to the speeches of the debaters for 10%, while the counter-replies for 6% compared to November. This is the highest percent of counter-replies from the beginning of the monitoring, whereas the percent of the replies was higher only in October. In December, apart from the session on parliamentary questions, the MPs have mostly discussed the amendments to the Law on High Education, the Draft-Law on Spatial and Urban Planning and the amendments to the Law on Administrative Officials.

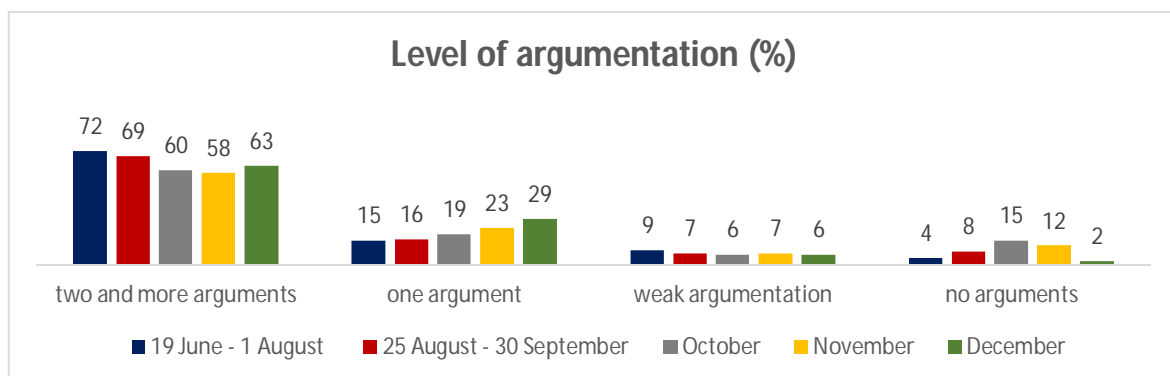


On the monitored sessions from December, male MPs gave 55% of the individual speeches, 52% of the replies and 28% of the counter-replies. On the other hand, female MPs gave 45% of the individual speeches, 48% of the replies and 72% of the counter-replies.



I. LEVEL OF SPEECH ARGUMENTATION

From the monitored speeches of the MPs according to the Discourse Quality Index, in 63% of the speeches there is an elaboration of the views with two or more arguments. In 29% of the speeches, the MPs have elaborated their views with one argument. In 6% of the speeches the argumentation was weak i.e. the elaboration given by the speaker was not considered to be a full argument. In 2% of the speeches, there is no argument at all. All in all, the level of argumentation in December with two arguments in the least is somewhat higher than that in October and November, but lower than in the two first periods from the monitoring (19 June – 1 August and 25 August – 30 September). In December, the discussions in which the MPs have used one argument reached 29%, which is the highest percent since the beginning of the monitoring. On that account, the percent of discussions without arguments has declined to 2%, which is the lowest up till now.

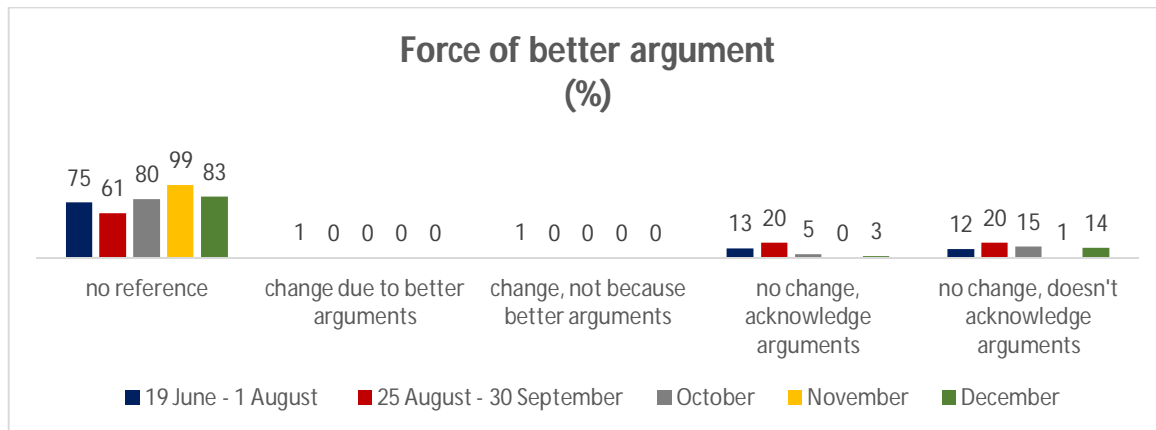


II. FORCE OF BETTER ARGUMENT

On the monitored sessions in December and in the previous three periods, none of the speakers changed their views for the sake of better arguments or for other reasons. Such changes in the views are noted only in the first monitored period (19 June – 1 August). Compared to November, the discussions in which the MPs did not refer to arguments expressed by other participants, have reduced to 16%. Nevertheless, this percent still holds high 83%, which is more than the first three monitored periods 19 June – 1 August, 25 August – 30 September and October. What is striking in

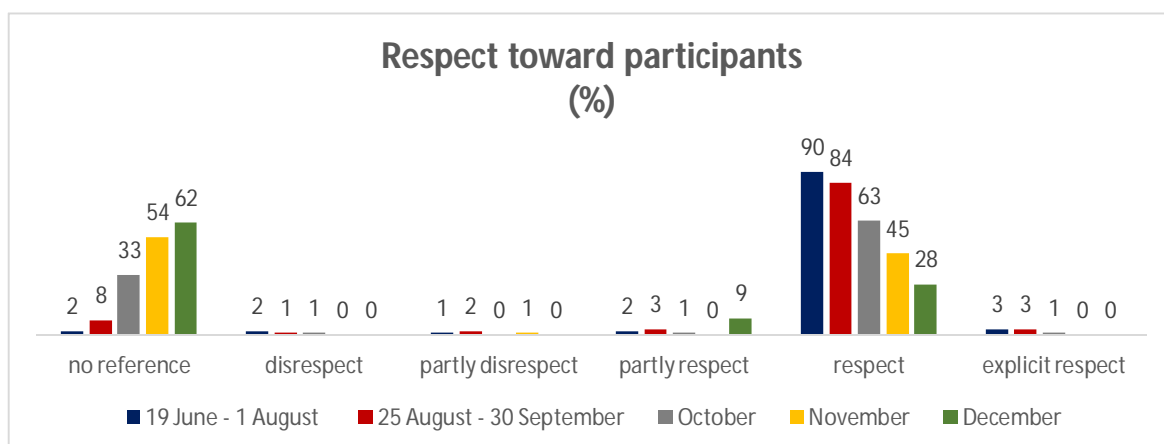


in 14% of the discussions, speakers neither changed their views nor acknowledged the value of the arguments expressed by other speakers. Only in 3% of the discussions the speakers did not change their views, but acknowledged the value of others' arguments.



III. RESPECT TOWARD OTHER MPs

In December, MPs did not show any respect towards other MPs for most of the part i.e. 62% of the discussions. That is 8% more than November and continuation of this rising trend, since the beginning of the monitoring in June. The second trend of decreasing the debates in which MPs show respect towards other MPs also continues in December, reaching 28% which is the lowest level from the beginning of the monitoring. In December, in 9 % of the discussions there was partial respect marked towards other MPs, meaning the speaker was mostly neutral, showing respect during most of the debate and a little disrespect towards other participants.

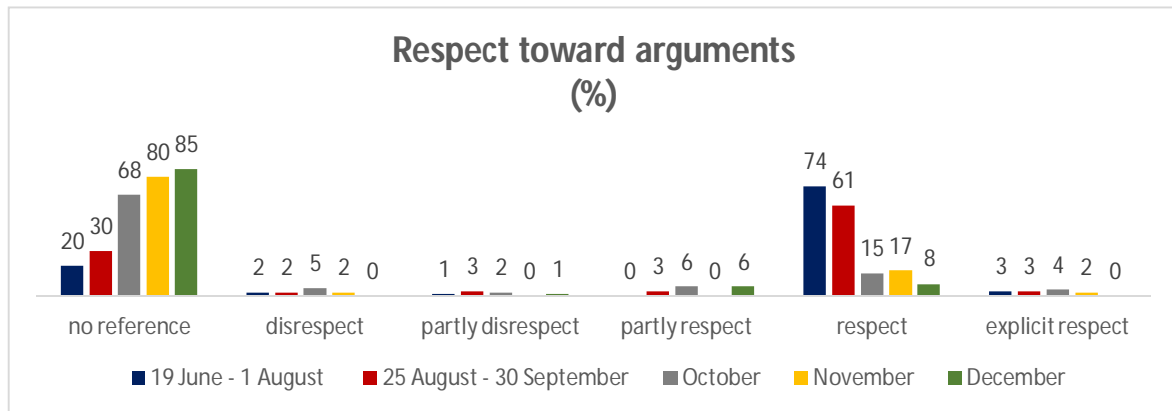


IV. RESPECT TOWARD ARGUMENTS



The MPs on the

monitored sessions in December the least respected the arguments of other speakers, compared to the previous monitored periods. That happened in 8% of their speeches, unlike the 17% in November, the 61% in the period between 25 August – 30 September or the 74% from 19 June – 1 August. On the other hand, the percent of the discussions in which the MPs did not show any respect for other MP's arguments reached the highest of 85%. In 8% of the discussions the speakers showed partial respect. This means that the MPs mostly remained neutral or showed respect towards others' arguments, while at the same time showing little disrespect.



V. CONTENT OF JUSTIFICATION OF ARGUMENTS AND INTERRUPTION

In 34% of the speeches in December parliamentary discussions, the MPs referred their views to the public good and the interest of all citizens. This tendency marks a decline of 11%, having in mind that in November the MPs referred to the public good in 45% of the discussions. In the first two monitored periods (19 June - 1 August and 25 August – 30 September) the MPs referred to the public good even in 88% of the discussions. In December, in 23% of the discussions the MPs referred to abstract principles like: social justice, peace, equality, life quality and suchlike, which is the highest percent from the beginning of the monitoring. The MPs referred to the benefits or costs of their own group (ethnic, political, religious or professional) in 29% of the discussions, which is a decline of 10% compared to November, but significantly more than October and the periods 19 June – 1 August and 25 August – 30 September. In 11% of the discussions, the MPs remained neutral i.e. did not refer to anything when expressing their arguments.



VI. ABUSIVE SPEECH

The MPs generally refrained from using abusive speech in the monitored debates from this period. In December, neither of the speakers used abusive speech, nor there was a case of constraints in MPs elaborations.

E. CONCLUSIONS

- The participants in the monitored sessions yet again did not show any interest and readiness for changing their views for the sake of a better quality arguments, having in mind that none of the MPs changed their views. At the same time, the percent of discussions in which speakers did not refer to the arguments of others remains high. When speakers did refer to the arguments of their colleagues, they mostly failed to acknowledge their value.
- The parliamentary questions and the amendments to the Law on High Education, the Law on Spatial and Urban Planning and those on the Law on Administrative Officials initiated a debate among the MPs, reflected through the increased number of replies among the MPs, compared to the previous monitored periods (November, the periods between 25 August – 30 September and 19 June – 1 August). The number of replies was higher only in October, while the number of counter-replies was the highest up till now.
- The Opposition MPs were more active compared to last month (November) and yet again reached the highest level of participation (21%) marked in October too.
- When it comes to the share in discussions by sex, both male and female MPs share equal 50% in the total number of discussions. Men had more individual speeches and replies, whereas women had more counter-replies. The discussion on larger part of the legal proposals remains generally weak, thus failing to test the validity of the prepared and expressed arguments through a public debate. Consequently, there is no chance for the arguments to be disputed or amended, which leaves the public deprived of different views leading to a better quality decisions for the public good and interest.



• Larger part from

the analyzed speeches during the monitoring period were supported with two or more arguments. In December, the percent of speeches supported with one argument marks a rise, whereas the percent of speeches with no arguments at all marks a decline.

- The percent of discussions in which speakers referred their arguments to the benefits of the public good decreased. On the other hand, the percent of discussions with speakers referring to abstract principles and those with speakers remaining neutral, increased.
- There was neither use of abusive speech during the monitored sessions in December, nor interruptions and constraints in the speeches of any of the MPs.

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