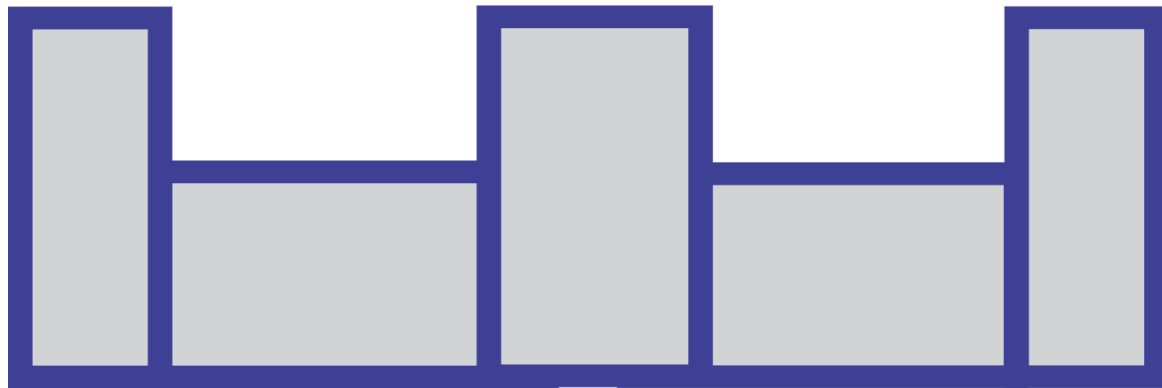




FOURTH MONITORING REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF THE DEBATE IN THE PARLIAMENT



PARLIAMENT WATCH

**Strengthening Political Debate
and Deliberative Discourse**

NOVEMBER 1, 2014



Fourth Monitoring Report on the Quality of the Debate in the Parliament

(November)

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 media with national coverage and distribution is conducted with aim to draw conclusions on the extent of which the general public is informed about the arguments placed forward by the Members of the Parliament (MPs).

A. SUMMARY

This report covers the monitoring period 1 -30 November 2014 and it includes 10 parliamentary sessions. The main conclusions of this Fourth report are that the discussion about legislation remains weak and that MPs had less interactions compared to the previous monitoring periods (19 June – 1 August, 25 August – 30 September and October). The decrease in the interaction is reflected through the decrease of number of replies and counter-replies.

The monitoring in November showed that external participants (non MPs) increased their share in the parliamentary discussions. This increase is caused by several public hearings that were organized at the committees and by the participation of Government representatives (Prime Minister, ministers and deputies) on plenary sessions dedicated to parliamentary questions. In addition, the Assembly held fewer plenary sessions in November compared to previous monitoring periods.

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 participation of women MPs was lower than in previous periods (25 August – 30 September and October) but higher compared to the first period (19 June – 1 August). In November, a larger part of speeches and a substantially higher proportion of replies were brought by male MPs.

Opposition MPs decreased their share in discussions compared to previous periods (25 August – 30 September and October) and equaled their share from the first period (19 June – 1 August).

The level of argumentation in the speech acts with two or more arguments continued to decline slightly and, in November, it reached the lowest level since the beginning of the monitoring in June 2014. On the other side, the percent of speech acts with one argument increased and reached the highest level.

Parliamentary questions, amendments to the Law for contributions for obligatory social insurance and changes to the Agenda of the Inter-Community Relations Committee were the topics that draw most of the attention of the MPs.

Remaining topics in the agenda of the Assembly in November passed with poor and one-sided or without any discussion.

As a consequence, the public was deprived once again of a quality debate on large part of the legislations. At the same time, it was missed the opportunity to test the validity and strength of arguments through debate and to create better public policies for the common good and public interest.

Generally, in November, MPs again remained in their “trenches”. Most of the individual MP discussions did not refer to other speeches and did not manage to persuade any other MPs to change their position and standpoints. With this, MPs in general also did not display readiness to amend their positions under the force of better arguments brought in the discussions by other speakers.

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
- 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

After each monitoring month, through monthly reports, the public is informed about the main findings from the monitoring of the quality of debate in the Assembly. Separate reports are also regularly published on the media reporting on the work of the Assembly.

C. POLITICAL CONTEXT

According to the Constitution, the Parliament holds the legislative power and it is consisted 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.

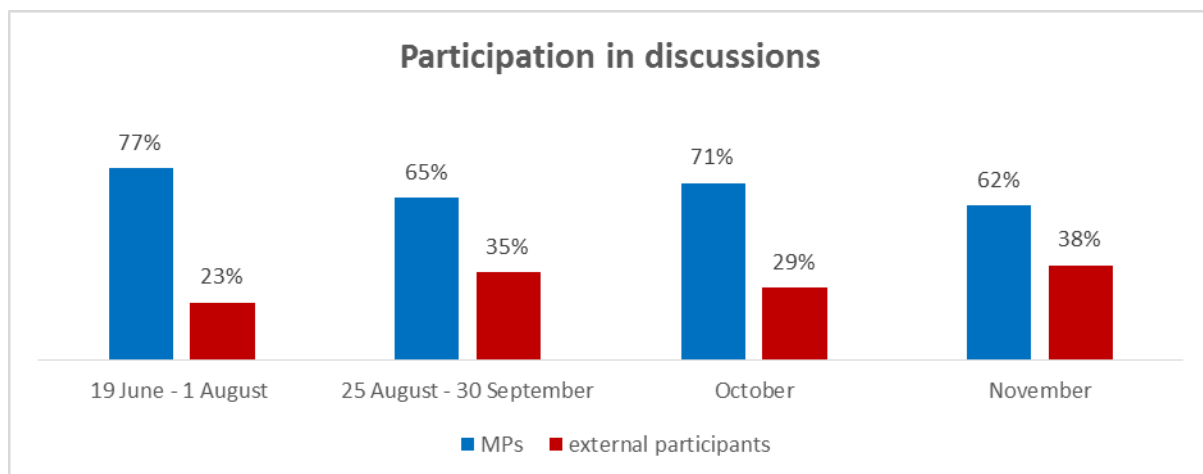
Since the beginning of the monitoring and until the publication of this report, most of the MPs from the main opposition coalition led by the party Social-Democratic Union for Macedonia (SDSM) that won 34 mandates on the elections boycotted the work of the Assembly. In November in the Assembly the opposition block was consisted by seven MPs of 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 continued in the following month and was not finished until the publication of this report.



D. FINDING FROM THE MONITORING (November)

The report covers the debate in the Assembly in the period from 1 to 30 November. It includes a total of 194 speech acts of participants on 10 parliamentary sessions, of which 4 are plenary and 6 sessions of parliamentary committees. The latter divide in one session of the Committee on the political system and inter-ethnic relations, Committee on European affairs, Legislative committee, Committee on election and appointment issues, Finances and budget committee and Inter-Community Relations Committee.

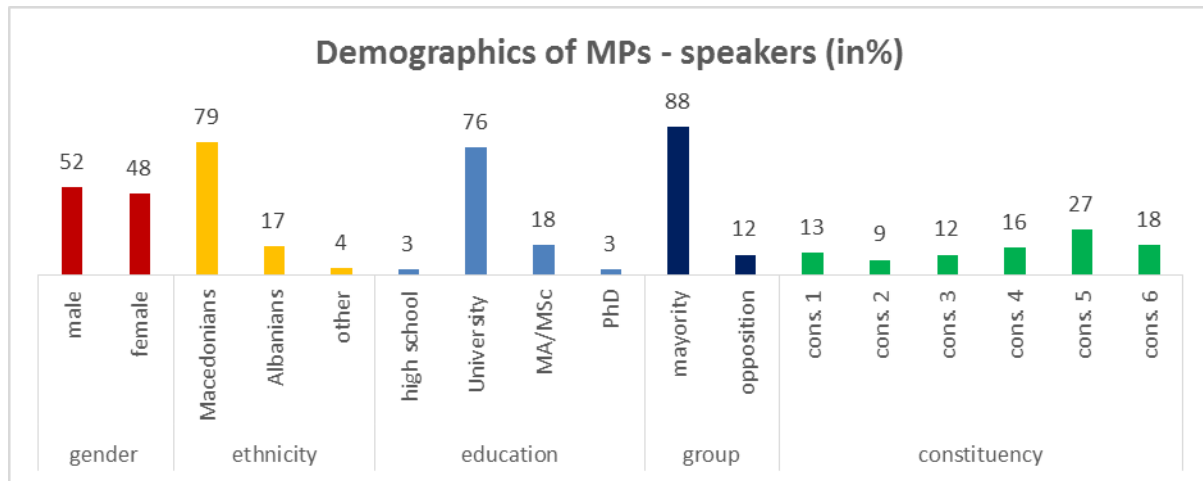
From the recalled speeches, 121 belong to MPs and 73 to outside participants in the work of the Assembly such as government ministers, representatives from ministries, state and public institutions. Participants commented on 25 topics chosen from the agenda of the Assembly. The report refers only to speech acts delivered by MPs.



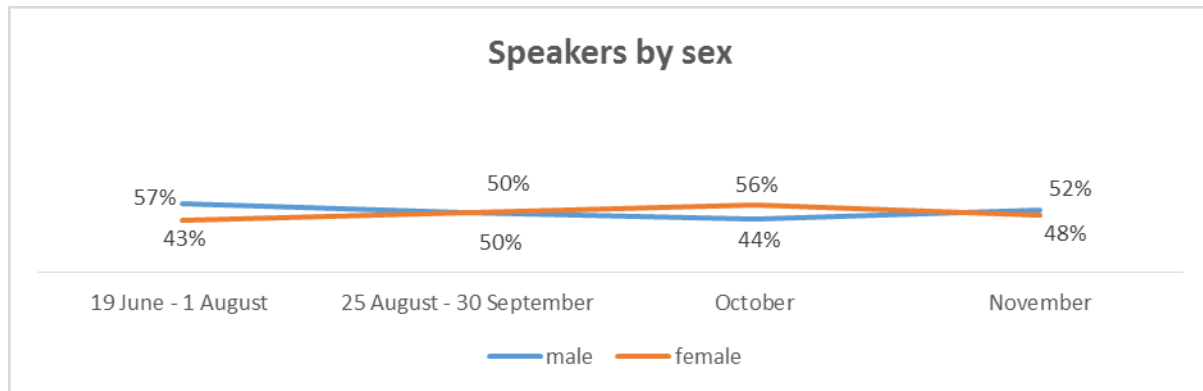
The demographic characteristics of the speakers in November are the following:

- Sex: 52% male, 48% female
- Ethnicity: 79% Macedonians, 17% Albanians, 4% other
- Education: 3% high school 76%, University, 18% MA/MSc, 3% PhD

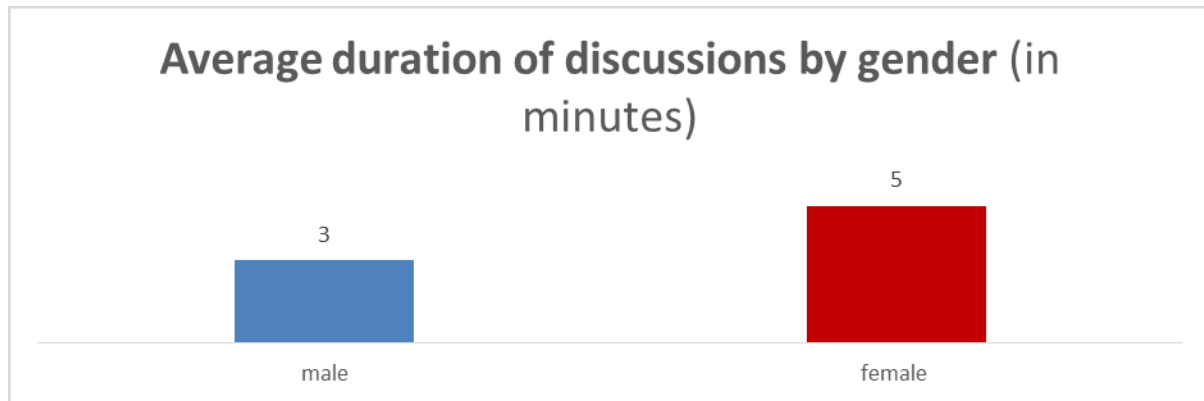
The MPs elected from the Constituency 5 were the most active in November.



The participation of female MPs in discussions on parliamentary sessions decreased compared with previous two monitoring periods (October and 25 August – 30 September). In November female MPs (35% of all active MPs in the Assembly) accounted 48% of all discussions on the monitored sessions. On the other side female MPs increased the total time of discussions. Each women in the Assembly spoke 5 minutes, and each male MP spoke 3 minutes in average.

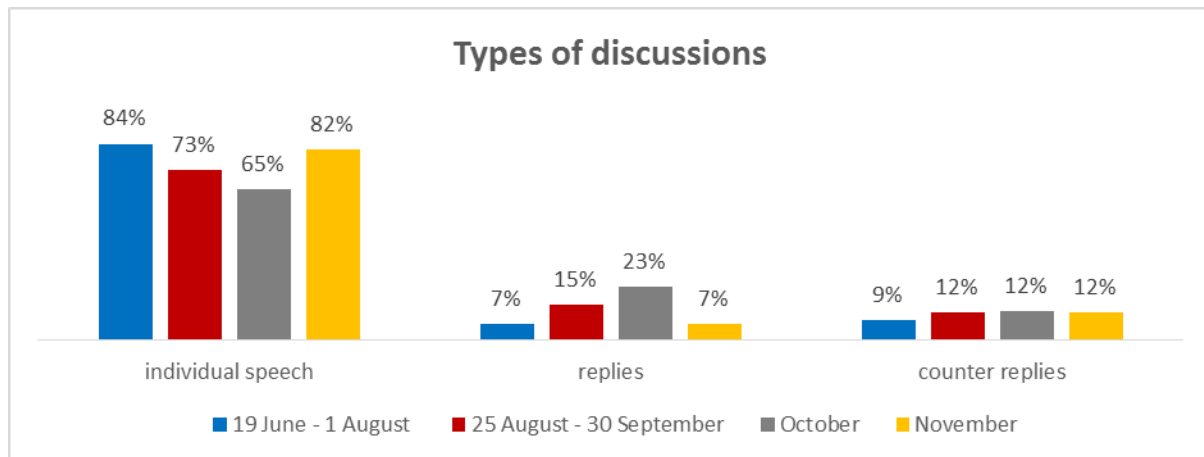


Due to the current context in which the Assembly works, most of the speakers (88%) belong to the ruling coalition. Opposition MPs decreased their shares in the discussions on 12% which is 9% lower compared to October.

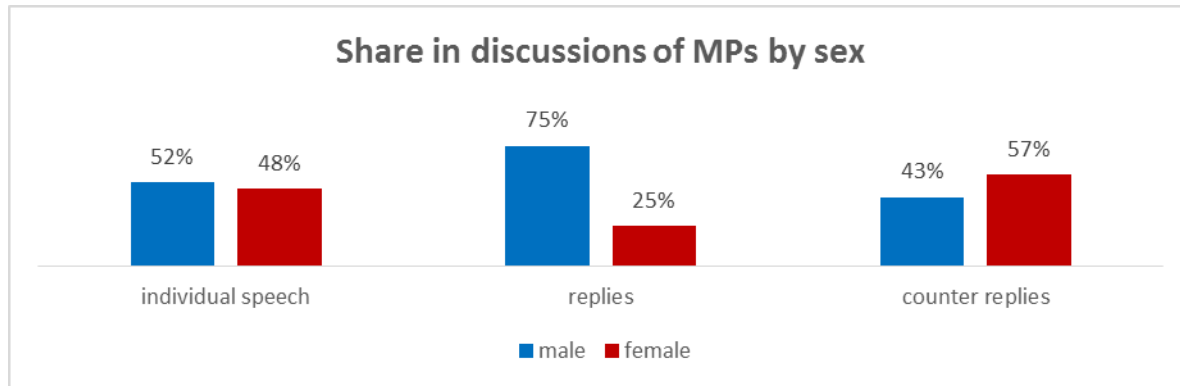


I. TYPE OF DISCUSSION AND INTERACTION

In the monitored sessions in November, only 7% of all discussions were replies and 12% counter-replies. Those are 16% less replies and comments over arguments of other MPs compared to October. The percent of counter-replies remain the same as in October – 12%. This percentage of replies is the lowest since the beginning of the monitoring period in June. Most of discussions that included replies and counter-replies took place in plenary session for parliamentary questions to government representatives.



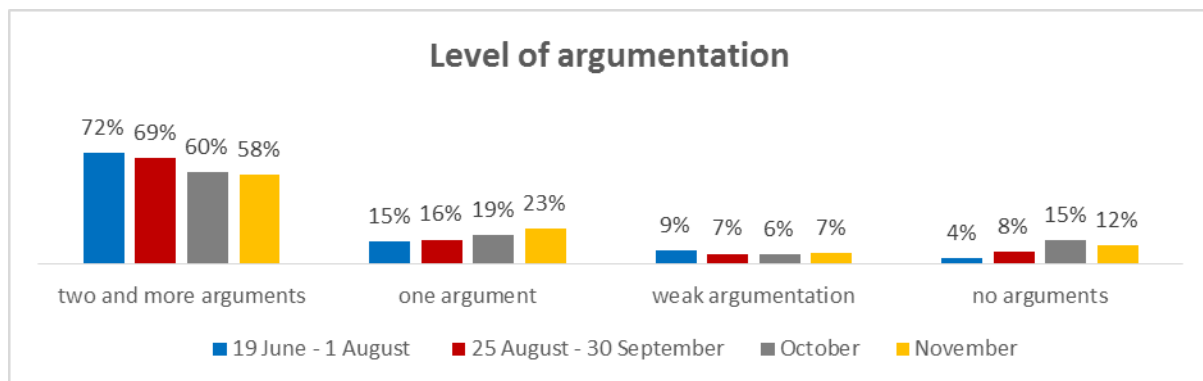
In this period it is noticeable that male MPs were more active, accounting 52% of speeches, 75% of replies and 43% of counter-replies.



II. LEVEL OF ARGUMENTATION

In this monitoring period, in 58% of discussions MPs used 2 or more arguments to justify their positions. In 23% of discussions, there was only one argument. In 7% of discussion, the argumentation was weak, meaning that the justification in the speech act was not enough to be considered for one complete argument. In 12% of cases, the MPs did not justify their position with any argumentation. In general, in November, the level of argumentation was relatively weaker compared to previous monitoring periods. The percent of discussions where the justification consisted of at least two arguments dropped of 2% compared to October, and of 14% compared to the first monitoring period (19 June – 1 August). The percent of discussions with one argument continued to rise and, in November, it reached 23%. That is 4% more than October and 8% more than in the period 19 June – 1 August.

The percent of speech acts without any argumentation decreased to 12% which is 3% lower than in October.

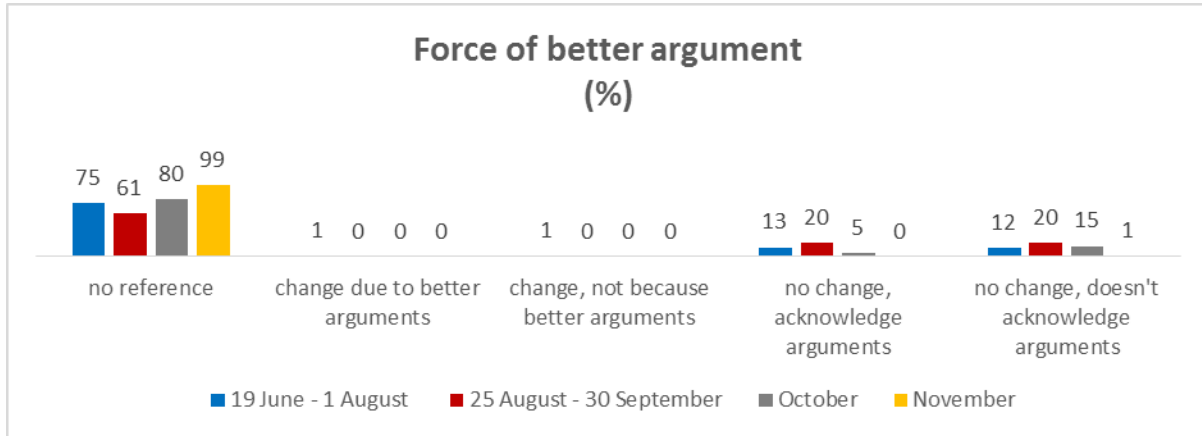


III. FORCE OF BETTER ARGUMENT

In line with the previous two monitoring periods (25 August – 30 September and October), the monitoring conducted in November did not show that any MP changed his/her position or standpoint because of better arguments used by other speakers or because of any other reason.

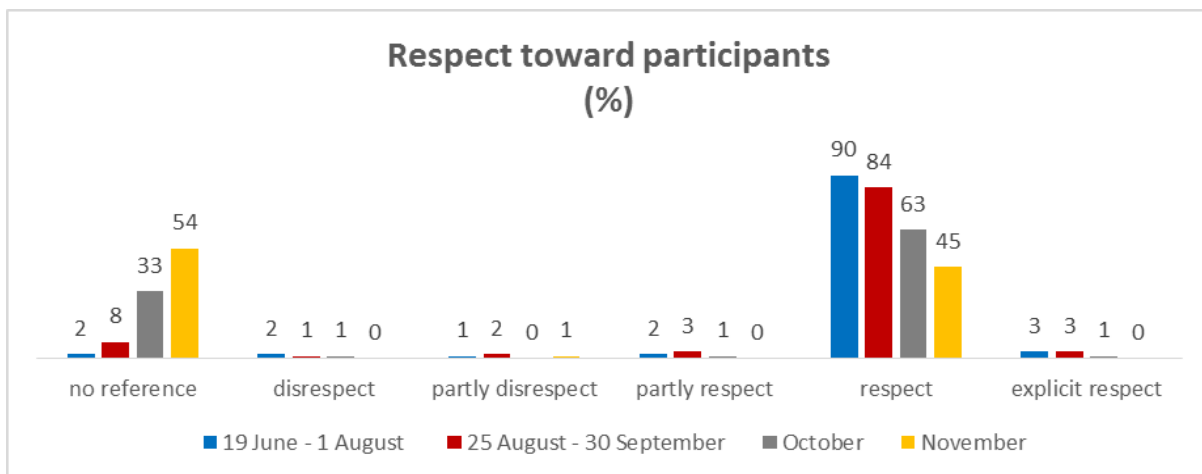


Contrary, there was an increase in the percent of discussions where the MPs did not refer at all to the arguments brought about by their colleagues. That was the case in 99% of discussions where speakers did not refer to other arguments - i. e. 19% more than in the previous monitoring period October when this was the case in 80%. In 1% of discussions MPs referred to other arguments but did not acknowledge their value and remained on their positions.



IV. RESPECT TOWARD OTHER MPs

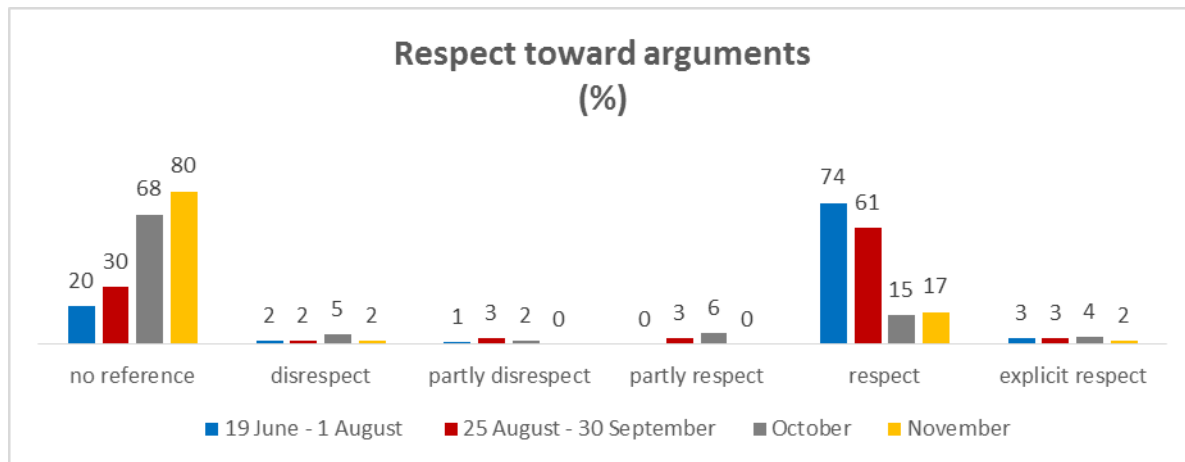
In November, speakers in 54% of discussions did not refer to any of the participants - which is 21% more than in October. In 45% of discussions speakers expressed basic respect towards other participants on parliamentary sessions – which is 18% less than in the previous period. In 1% of discussions speakers expressed partial disrespect toward other participants on sessions. That means that speakers in larger part of the discussion expressed disrespect, while in smaller part showed respect or were neutral. The monitoring did not notice a case were participants expressed complete disrespect toward other participants.





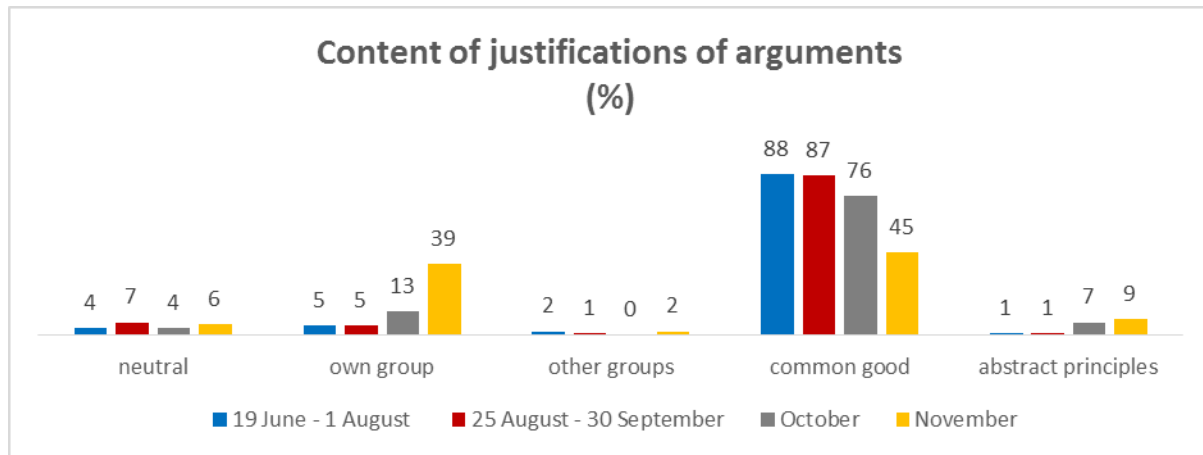
V. RESPECT TOWARD ARGUMENTS

In the monitoring period, MPs showed once again less willingness to express respect toward the arguments of other speakers compared to the first two monitored periods (19 June–1 August and 25 August–30 September). They expressed respect in 17% of discussions, compared to 74% in 19 June–1 August and 61% in 25 August–30 September. This however represent an increase of 2% compared to October. Disrespect toward arguments of other speaker was notified in 2% of discussions. In 80% of discussions, speakers did not refer at all to arguments of other speakers.



VI. CONTENT OF JUSTIFICATION OF ARGUMENTS AND INTERRUPTION

In the reporting period, in 45% of speech acts, MPs use benefits and costs for citizens as main referential points of their arguments. This represent a considerable change from the previous monitoring period when the same reference appeared in 76% of discussions. This percent was even higher in the periods 19 June-1 August (87%) and in 25 August-30 September (88%). In 39% of discussions, speakers justify their arguments through reference to their own group (political or ethnical); this happened 26% times more than in October and 34% times more than in the first two monitoring periods. Most of this discussions (81%) took place in plenary sessions for parliamentary questions to government representatives. In 9% of cases, MPs referred to abstract principles such as, among the others, social justice, peace, equality, quality of life.



VII. ABUSIVE SPEECH

In general, in the monitored period, participants to monitored parliamentary sessions refrained from using offensive or abusive statements. In 98% of speech acts, the use of offensive or abusive speech was not registered at all. In this period, none of the speakers were constrained to express their arguments.

CONCLUSIONS:

- The discussion in the Assembly during the fourth monitoring period (1 – 30 November) was in largest part characterized by individual speeches with slightly less frequent interaction that is reflected in the decreased number of replies and counter replies between MPs compared to the previous monitoring periods (October and 25 August – 30 September) and identical number if compared to the first monitoring period (19 June – 1 August).
- Female MPs decreased their share in the discussions. Male MPs are accounted for most of speeches and for a considerably larger part of replies.
- The discussion on larger part of legislation remains generally weak and did not allow to challenge and test the validity and viability of the prepared and presented arguments by the MPs. Therefore the public was deprived of different arguments and points of view which should enable the creation of better decisions in favor of the common good and public interest.
- Most of the discussions that were subject to the monitoring were justified by 2 or more arguments. The percent of those acts of speech again slightly decreased compared to previous months, while increased the percent of discussions with one argument. The percent of discussions in which speakers did not present any argument also decreased.
- MPs in large extent did not show interest for arguments of other speakers, nor readiness for changing their positions due to better arguments presented in the debate. Again, in November, there was not a case when a speaker indicated change in the position due to



better arguments or of any other reason. Simultaneously the percent of discussions where speakers do not refer at all to arguments of other speakers increased.

- In few cases (2%) MPs used inappropriate speech.

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