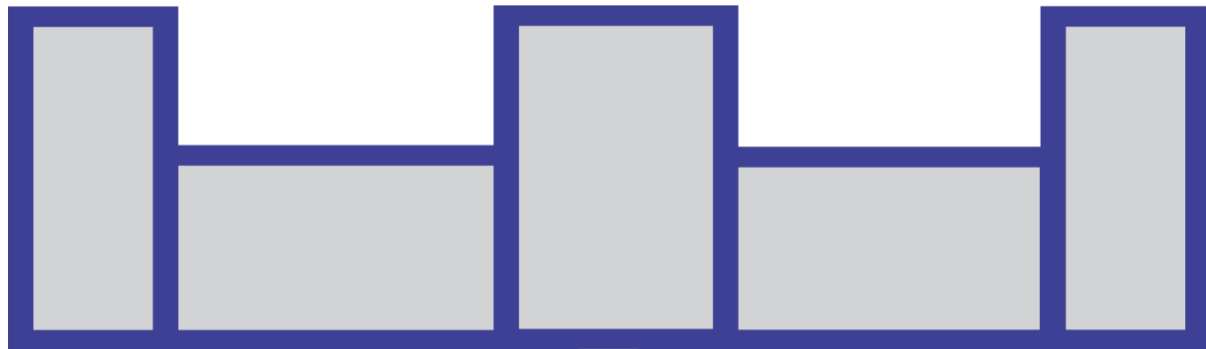




MONITORING REPORT OF THE QUALITY OF THE PARLIAMENT'S DEBATE



PARLIAMENT WATCH

Strengthening Political Debate
and Deliberative Discourse

JUNE – JULY 2014



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The project is funded by the European Union

Monitoring Report of the Quality of the Parliament's Debate

(19 June – 31 July)

The Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis” – Skopje (IDSCS) and the Institute for Central, Eastern Europe and Balkans (IECOB) starting from June 2014 are monitoring the quality of the debates in the Macedonian Parliament. The monitoring is part of the project “Parliament Watch! Strengthening the political debate and deliberative discourse” financed by the European Union and co-financed by the Institute for Democracy.

Trough applying the ‘Discourse Quality Index’¹ each speech act in the plenary and in the sessions of eight parliamentary committees, selected based on their importance for political debate and political culture in the country, is being assessed based on several 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.

A. Summary

The main findings in the first report of the monitoring are that in the monitoring period 19 June – 3 August, which includes 20 parliamentary sessions, the speeches of the members of the Parliament (MPs) were mostly supported with arguments.

Characteristic of this period is that the MPs from the main opposition block lead by SDSM, who decided to boycott the Assembly, do not take part in the work of the Assembly. It is noticeable that there is little interaction between the MPs during the sessions and poor exchange of arguments and opinions about the legislative proposals. This is also noticeable through the small number of replies which does not allow the validity and the strength of the arguments to be tested through a debate and also shortens the possibility the arguments to be disputed or supplemented with others views

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

The original Discourse Quality Index 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 like Germany, USA, Switzerland and the European Parliament.



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wherefrom the public is deprived of different views and arguments which could contribute to creation of better laws in favor of the common good and the public interest.

In most of the cases the MPs did not show much interest in the arguments of other speakers nor will and preparedness to change their own positions under the force of better arguments brought by other MPs in the debates.

Regarding the use of inappropriate or abusive speech the monitoring reflected use of such speech in very rare occasions, which altogether with the small number of interruptions and constrains, indicates to low polarization in the work of the Assembly in the monitored period.

B. Research methodology

The Discourse Quality Index 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
- Are the speakers interrupted or constrained or they are able to give their speeches freely
- Is there a use of inappropriate or abusive speech

The monitoring focus 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 elections and appointment issues
- Committee on European affairs
- Standing inquiry committee for protection of civil freedoms and rights



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- Legislative committee
- Committee on local self-government

In parallel to this, as part of the project, a monitoring of the media coverage on the work of the Parliament is conducted in order to see to what extent the public is familiar with the content of the parliamentary debates and the arguments brought by the MPs.

After each monitoring month, through monthly reports, the public will be informed about the main findings from the monitoring of the quality of debate in the Assembly, and the media coverage.

C. Political context

According with the Constitution, the Assembly, has the legislative power and it is comprised of 123 seats. The Members of the parliament are directly elected based on proportional electoral system and have a mandate of 4 years. At the last early parliamentary elections conducted in April 2014, VMRO – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) won 61 mandates, and their coalition partner with whom they formed the government the Democratic Union for Integration won 19 seats. Citizens Option for Macedonia (GROM) and the National Democratic Rebirth (NDP), each have one mandate each.

Since the beginning of the monitoring until the publication of the first 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 that time the main opposition to the majority in the Assembly, was consisted of 7 MPs from the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) and 3 MPs from the opposition coalition of SDSM who decided not to boycott the Assembly.

This report does not include the sessions of the parliamentary committees that took place after the vacation of the Parliament including the session of the Finance and budget committee where a brawl erupted between DPA and DUI MPs.

D. Findings from the monitoring (19 June - 31 July)

The report covers the debate in the Assembly in the period from 19 June to 31 July. It includes total of 412 act of speeches of participants on 20 parliamentary sessions, of which 13 are plenary and 7 sessions of parliamentary committees. From these speeches, 318 belong to MPs and 94 to other outside participants in the work of the Assembly like government ministers, representatives from



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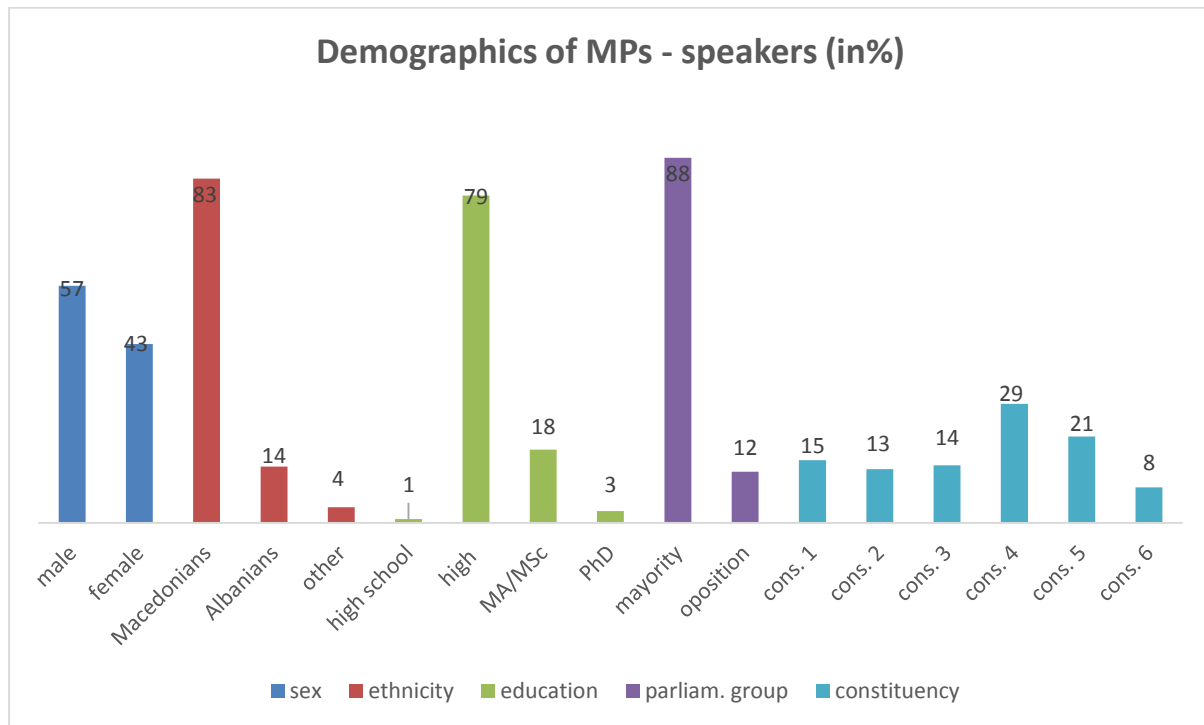
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ministries, state and public institutions. The participants made their speeches on total of 96 topics from the agenda of the Parliament. The report refers only to the speech act of MPs.

The demographic characteristic of the speakers were by:

- Sex: 57% male, 43% female
- Ethnicity: 83% Macedonians, 14% Albanians
- Education: 79% University, 18% masters in science

As a results of the political context in which the Parliament is working, majority of speakers (88%) are from the ruling coalition. According to the electoral unit where the MPs were elected, most active are those who come from the 4th constituency which includes the south and south-eastern part of the country.



I. Level of argumentation

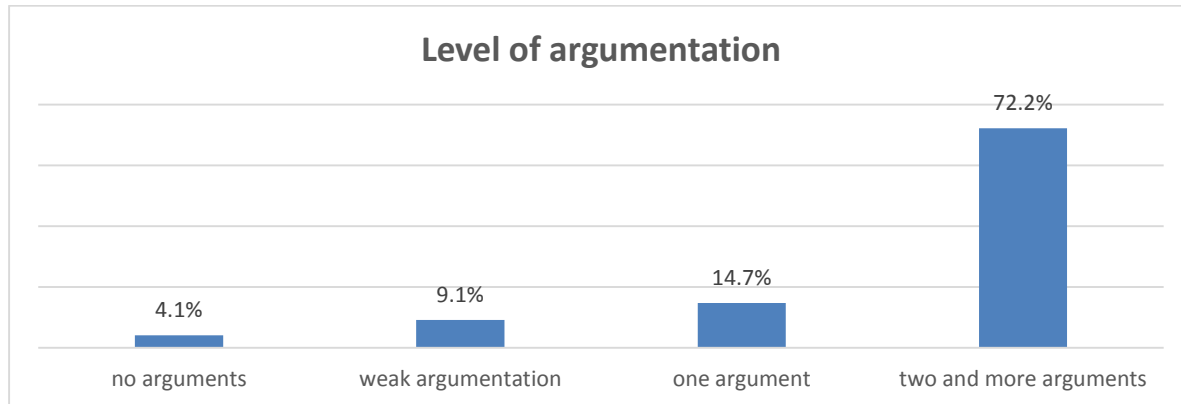


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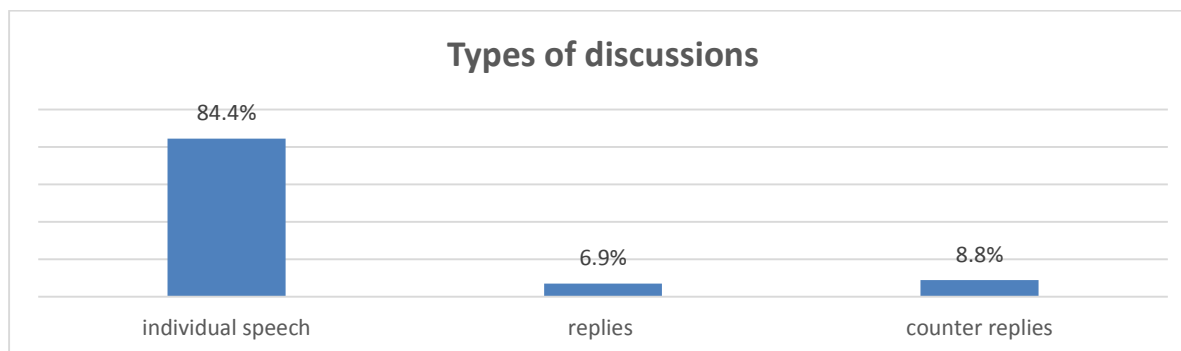
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Using the Discourse Quality Index the main results for the monitoring period are that in 72,2% MPs' speeches used 2 or more than 2 arguments to justify their positions. In 14,7% of speeches there was one argument. In 9,1% the argumentation was weak and in 4,1% the MPs did not justify their position with arguments at all.



II. Types of speech and interaction

The monitoring showed little interaction between participants in parliamentary debates. Of the total number of acts of discussions in 84.4% of cases were individual speeches by MPs. Only 6,9% are replies to previous speeches and 8,8% counter replies. This impression is confirmed also with the next analyzed category or the preparedness of MPs to accept better arguments brought in the debates and their openness for changing their positions due to better arguments presented in the debate.



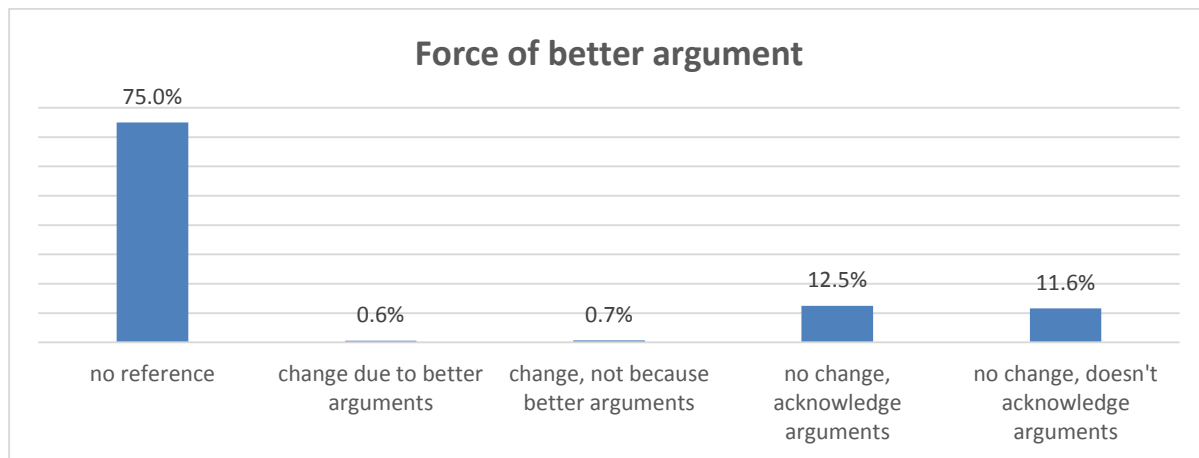


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In 75% of discussions, the MPs did not at all address any of the arguments of other participants in the debate. Only in two cases, speakers indicated change in their position and referring to other arguments heard during the debate. In three cases MPs indicated change of their positions but did not refer to other arguments. In 12,5% MPs acknowledge the worthiness of others arguments but did not change their positions. In 11,6% speakers did not change their positions nor acknowledged the worth of others discussions.

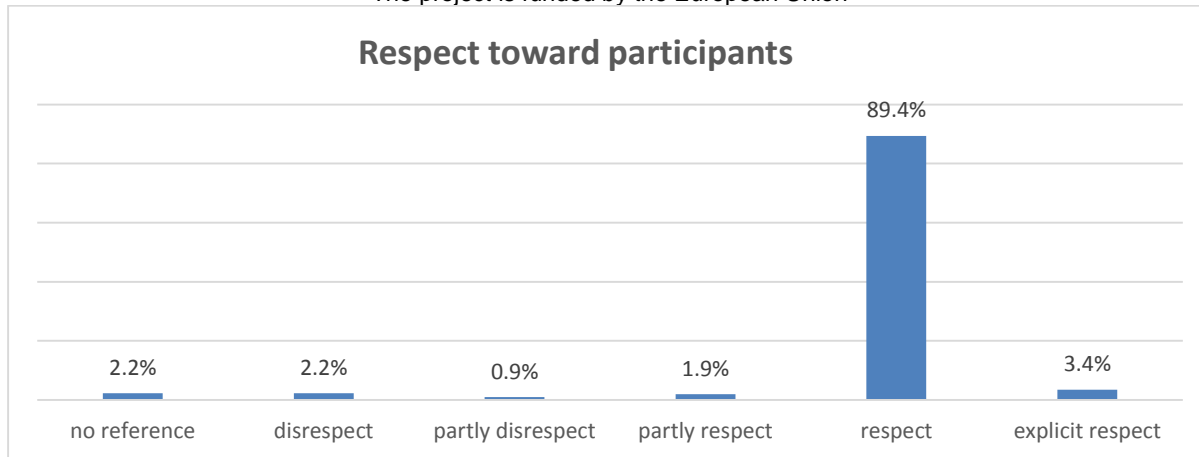


III. Respect for other MPs and their arguments

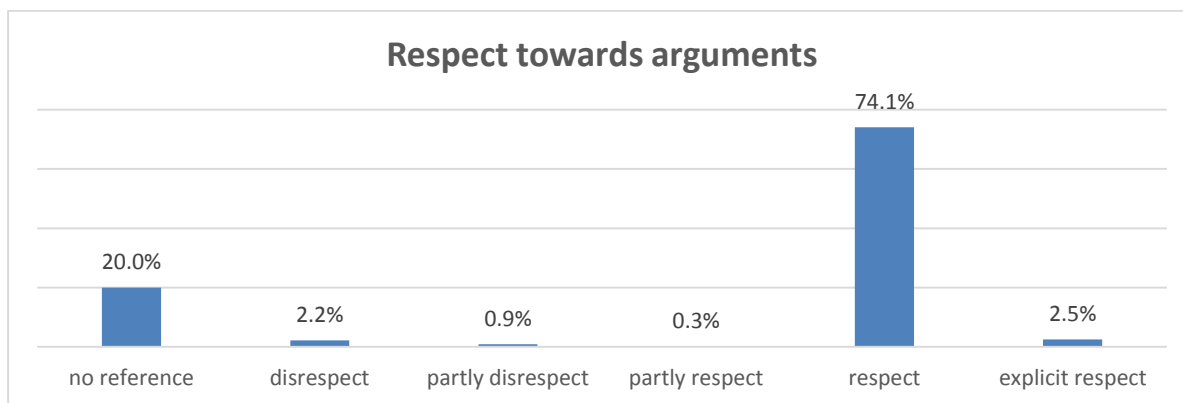
The MPs in the monitoring period in their discussions mostly showed respect towards other MPs and participants on parliamentary sessions. In 90% of speeches the MPs showed basic respect towards others participants and in 3,4% showed explicit respect to other participants. In 2,2% MPs openly showed disrespect towards other MPs.



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Most of the MPs or in 74% of their discussions showed respect towards speeches of other MPs. Explicit respect was noted in 2,5% of cases and in 20% MPs did not show any reference to others arguments. In 2,2% of discussions, speakers showed disrespect towards others arguments.

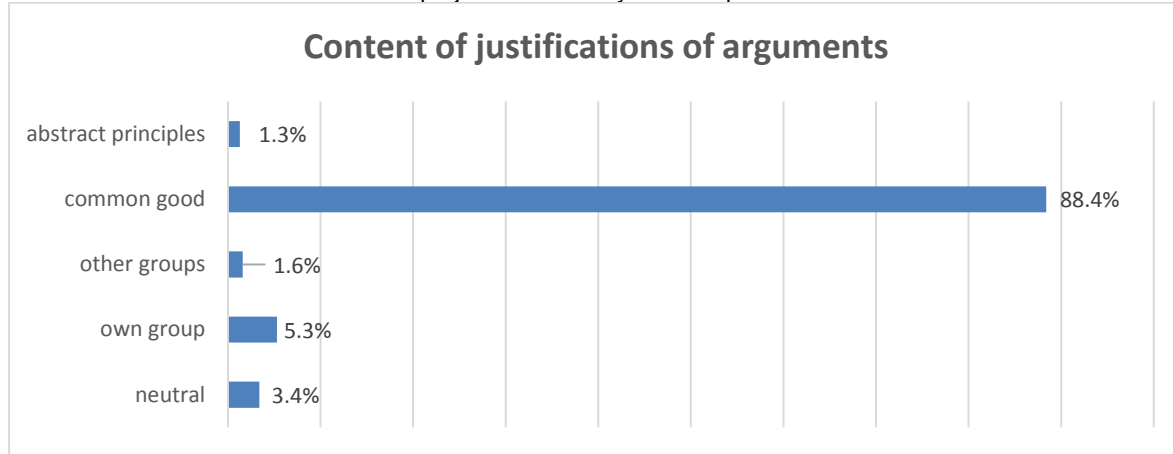


IV. Content of justifications of arguments and interruptions

Participants in parliamentary sessions in their discussions mostly or in 88,4% refer their arguments to the common good or to benefits and costs for all groups in the country. In 1,3% they refer to abstract principles as social justice, peace, equality, quality of life, etc. In 5,3% they refer to benefits and costs for their own ethnical or political group. In 1,6% they refer to other groups and in 3,4% MPs did not refer to any group.



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Participants in monitored parliamentary sessions refrained from use of offensive or abusive language. Only in 3,4% of speeches there were elements of inappropriate language toward other MPs. In this period there was not any case of such usage of such language toward arguments. Also, MPs in general, had the liberty to express their arguments unconstrained because only in 1,9% of cases there were short interruptions. In only one case a Member of the Parliament indicated that he was limited to express his arguments.



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E. CONCLUSIONS:

- In the monitoring period, the parliamentary debate was characterized with individual speeches with little interaction between the participants on sessions which does not contributed to exchange of different opinions and arguments about legislative proposals.
- The rare interaction, reflected though considerably small number of replies and counter replies to speeches, 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 creation of better decisions in favor of the common good and public interest.
- Most of the discussions which were subject to the monitoring were justified with 2 and more than 2 arguments.
- The participants on the parliamentary sessions in large extent did not show interest for the arguments of other speakers. The readiness for changing their positions due to better arguments presented in the debate was limited to just few exemptions.
- The MPs in rare cases used softer forms of inappropriate language which altogether with the small number of constrains and interruptions indicates to low polarization in the work of Parliament in that period.

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