



DEBATE FROM TRENCHES

Analysis of the quality of discussion in the Assembly

June 2014 – May 2015

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INTRODUCTION

The quality of the debate in the Assembly is an important factor that affects the quality of the adopted political decisions, the legal solutions and the possibilities of the Assembly to function as a controller of the work of the executive government. The manner of adopting decisions in the Assembly may be a significant indicator of the level of democracy and the political culture in a society. At the same time, the manner of adopting decisions may equally affect how the citizens see them, either as welcomed, good, essential and long-term or as imposed with a possible short duration. Therefore, the centre of our interest in this analysis is the essence of the legislation process in the Assembly, i.e. the parliamentary debate on the sessions. Having into consideration that the discussion is the basic tool for shaping the laws and other decision by the representatives, which affect the life of the citizens and the social and economic processes, it is only logical that we try to measure its quality.

But, how to empirically measure the quality of the discussion, thus setting the quantitative and qualitative directions for its improvement? The theoreticians of the deliberative democracy established a methodology, Discourse Quality Index, which enables separate analysis of each act of speech given by the participants in the parliamentary sessions.

The Index enables determining the degree of argumentation of each of the observed speeches and the openness of the speakers towards deliberation for the common good. Concurrently, the index enables realizing the general contours of how the Assembly adopts the laws from the well-argued point of view, based on the statistical sample created within the project "Parliament Watch"¹ with the analysis of over 2000 discussions given on more than 100 Assembly's sessions.

The deliberation suggests that the political decision making is based more on argument discussion rather than simple reflection of the power of the political actors based on the votes obtained in the elections. Therefore, the deliberative theory understands the political process as a process where the political actors refer to each other, listen to each other, reasonably explain their positions, reasonably analyze the arguments of other speakers, show mutual respect and have will to re-evaluate and review their positions through the process of discussion where they demonstrate their value and that of the attitudes of other participants.²

Adopting decisions by consensus by the political actors is not considered an imperative in the deliberative theory. It is significant that the discussion in which these decisions are made is reasonable and well-argued whereas the better arguments prevail. All concerned parties should be listened to so that the adopted decisions are better accepted by the citizens, thus enabling them to be more long-term and justified.

The original Discourse Quality Index is constructed by Jürg Steiner, André Bächtiger, Marco R. Steenbergen and Markus Spörndli. The Index is an instrument which enables quantitative measurement of the quality and the level of deliberation in the discussions. Thereby the Index is used

¹<http://idscs.org.mk/mk/tekovni-proekti/sobraniето-pod-lupa>

² "Measuring political deliberation: A Discourse Quality Index", Marco R. Steenbergen, Andre Bachtiger, Markus Spörndli and Jürg Steiner, Comparative European Politics, 2003.



form does not give a possibility for perceiving the influence of particular discussions and arguments on the final outcome of the debates.

The original Discourse Quality Index, made by the abovementioned theoreticians, was adjusted by the IDSCS project team in several points according to the conditions and the political culture in the country prior to the start of the observation of the Assembly's sessions.

Parallel to the observation of the Assembly's discussion, the media were also analyzed on how they inform of the MPs' work and their arguments on the sessions.

This analytical report presents the findings of monitoring the quality of the Assembly's debate and the media informing of the Assembly, conducted in the period between June 2014 to May 2015 within the project "Parliament Watch, Strengthening the Political Debate and Deliberative Discourse". The project is conducted by the Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" – IDSCS and the Institute for Central-Eastern and Balkan Europe – IECOB and is financed by the European Union.

The Discourse Quality Index of the debate, the political context in which the monitoring took place, the observation methodology of the media reporting, as well as the main findings and conclusions are presented below. The report has been prepared based on a 10 monthly reports on the quality of the debate in the Assembly, 9 monthly reports on the media reporting and one report dedicated exclusively to the Assembly's debate regarding the draft-law on modifications and amendments to the Law on Higher Education. Two field researches of the public opinion on the work of the Assembly were also conducted within the project³.

The findings obtained from the observation of the Assembly, the media and the public opinion comprised a basis for conducting trainings of the younger members of almost all relevant political parties in the country on the role of a well-argued debate in the political decision making process.

What does the Discourse Quality Index measure?

The subject of analysis with the Discourse Quality Index is each speech in the monitored discussion. The political speeches given in the parliament have time limitation which is determined by the Assembly's Rules of Procedure. The limited time restricts the room for debate so the discussions of the participants are expected to have a structure by which the participants can explain their position or that of the party within the limited time and foster it with arguments which will be clear and understandable to other participants and the public. Using the DQI, the observers analysed each separate speech act on the selected parliamentary discussions and note the following:

- The level of argumentation, i.e. how many arguments foster the speaker's position;
- Whether the arguments presented by other participants caused change in the speaker's position and whether there is an openness towards accepting the arguments of other participants;
- Whether the speaker shows respect towards other participants;
- Whether the speaker shows respect towards arguments of other participants;

³Links from the surveys



- Whether the speaker relates his/her arguments to benefits or consequences for a certain group or for the common good;
- Whether the speaker enforces his/her argumentation by using stories, testimonies, anecdotes, jokes during the speech;
- Whether the speaker use inappropriate language;
- Whether the speaker is free to state his/her attitudes and positions without being interrupted,
- Whether the speaker beside the verbal statement uses gesticulations or body language for supporting his/her performance or sending a message to the participants or followers of the discussion.

Level of argumentation

The deliberative theory implies that the decision-making discussion includes explanation of the positions and claims with arguments which can be based on facts, evidence, examples, convictions or assumptions having clear and understandable logical connection. The speeches based on arguments can be critically analyzed by the other participants, disputed with counterarguments or amended by others so that the final decisions of the debate would be more substantial and more accepted by the concerned social groups. The debaters try to persuade or dissuade other participants by the argumentation in the debate as well as the public in the righteousness of their claims and positions and in the righteousness or the benefits of the desired outcome of the discussion.

The observers examined the wholeness of the arguments in relation to the claims and positions that are to be supported by the said arguments. Thereby the wholeness of an argument is not assessed solely upon its clarity and explicitness. The observers assess the explanations as arguments, which are less explicit and direct as well. For instance, the explanations which include claims of common consent and common acceptance, but are not stated in the speech. Thereby, the observers assess only the implicit explanations as arguments, for which there is no doubt regarding their interpretation and which are clearly understood by the participants in the discussion. However, parts of the speakers' statements which at first glance might have seemed as arguments, but wherein intentional or unintentional "logical mistakes" were noticed, were taken into consideration in the analysis but not as an argument speech. The category **Level of argumentation** in the adapted Index has four values:

1. No explanation. When the speaker does not present any arguments (for example, only asks for additional information or only confirms/denies without giving any explanation);
2. Weak explanation. The speaker says that something should or should not have been done, that it is a good or bad idea, but fails to explain why it should be done in a certain way;
3. One argument. The speaker gives wider explanation/reason why something should/should not be done or why something is good or bad,
4. Two and more arguments. The speaker gives at least two reasons/explanations why something should/should not be done or why something is good or bad.

Use of stories



The MPs may explain their positions and claims or reinforce the arguments by using stories, testimonies, anecdotes or jokes. From the aspect of the deliberative theory, it is considered that the use of stories enables the speakers in the discussion, whose purpose is political decision making, to explain their positions in a more picturesque way as well as to demonstrate the point, the possible outcomes and the consequences of their arguments to other speakers and the public. According to the theoreticians, if the story use is well-balanced, it can bring emotion and empathy in part of the political discussions. On the other hand, there is a danger of the stories distracting the attention from the main topic of discussion. There are four values in the category **Stories** in the adapted Discourse Quality Index:

1. No story.
2. There is a story; the speaker relates it to an argument.
3. The story is the only explanation.
4. The story related to an argument is part of a wider rational explanation.

Explanation range

The deliberative theory implies that the actors in the political decision making process in the parliament act upon their own will. As representatives of the voters they act upon the interest of the citizens and of the common good with a sense of solidarity and empathy for the needs of the citizens, the communities and of the welfare of the wider community in general. That does not mean that the MPs personal interest and motivation are completely excluded in their performances and positions they hold. However, it is highly valued when the representatives act upon their personal interest that they insist on harmonizing and directing it so that it leads towards the common good of the citizens. According to that, the observers note whether the speakers in explaining their positions relate the arguments to consequences or benefits for the social groups or to the common good of all citizens. The category *Explanation range* has five values:

1. Neutral. Speaker does not address the benefits or consequences for any group/party/common good.
2. Own group. Speaker addresses the benefits or consequences for their own group/party/ethnic community.
3. Other groups. Speaker addresses the benefits or consequences for other groups/parties/ethnic communities.
4. Common good. Speaker addresses the benefits or consequences for everybody in the society.
5. Abstract principles. Speaker calls upon abstract principles as social justice, freedom, peace, life quality, equality.

Strength of a better argument

Part of deliberative theoreticians⁴ considers that a reasonable disagreement is an undisputable fact in the modern complex societies. Due to numerous different starting positions of the participants in the political decision making processes, the theoreticians agree that often “the best argument” cannot be

⁴ Foundations of deliberative democracy, Cambridge University Press, 2012



found and accordingly reaching a consensus for the decisions is not a necessity. However, they think that the deliberative discussion may bring to decisions⁵ or agreements which are based on arguments rather than on strategic negotiation/bargaining between the participants/parties. In such case it is considered that even if there is no agreement among the participants, the minority party that loses will be aware that its vote and arguments are heard and rejected in a fair and well-argued rational discussion. Thereby "the losing party" shall respect the legitimacy of the decision and of its own limitations, even though their position was rejected. In this direction is the next category of the Index which identifies whether the participants in the discussion change their initial position influenced by better arguments stated by other speakers and whether they accept the value of the positions of other participants in the discussions. The category *Strength of a better argument* in the adapted Index has five values:

1. No reference. The speaker does not address the arguments stated by other at all.
2. Change of position due to better arguments. The speaker indicates a change in position, explaining that the arguments stated in the debate are the reason for the changed position.
3. Change of position but not due to arguments. The speaker indicates a change in position, but does not point to the arguments in the debate as a reason.
4. There is no change in position, but does acknowledge the value of the arguments. The speaker remains at its position, but acknowledges the value of the arguments stated in the debate.
5. There is no change in position, and the speaker does not acknowledge the value of the arguments of other participants.

Attitude towards the participants and the arguments

One of the basic requirements for developing argued discussion on a session where political decisions are made is to establish basic respect among the participants. Thereby the respect does not come only from the personal relations among the MPs from different groups but also from the fact that they act as equals and as representatives of their voters and electoral units. By respecting the participants in the discussions they acknowledge the needs and the rights of the different groups and their right to different opinion and position. The discussion containing basic respect has opportunity to develop into a deliberative direction. The discussion where the participants openly show disrespect towards other speakers and their positions and arguments by attacks based on their personality or political affiliation has a far greater possibility for even greater dissonance, from which practically they will not regard the essence of the arguments. Therefore, such discussion most likely will be determined by the mightier (majority) group outvoting the less numerous one (minority), whereas the "defeated" will have a sense that the righteousness and the value of their attitudes and arguments have not been challenged and defeated in rational discussion rather than the outcome is simply a result of numerical supremacy of the majority.

By the adapted Index for monitoring the quality of debate in the analyzed acts of speech, the elements which are located refer to two categories: 1) Whether the speaker demonstrates a relation towards

⁵Ibid.



the personalities of other speakers in the discussion, and 2) Whether the speaker demonstrates a relation towards arguments stated by the other speakers on the session.

Both categories, respect towards the participants and respect towards the arguments of other participants have five values:

1. No reference. The speaker does not show anything in his/her speech in relation to other participants or arguments of other participants;
2. Disrespect. The speaker in his/her speech directs personal and party attacks and insults towards other participants or their arguments ;
3. Partial disrespect. The speaker in most of his/her speech directs personal and party attacks and insults, but in smaller part has a neutral attitude or shows respect towards other participants or their arguments;
4. Partial respect. The speaker in most of his/her speech has a neutral attitude towards other participants or addresses personal or party appraisals, but in some part of it directs party attacks and insults towards other participants or arguments of other participants;
5. Respect. The speaker shows a basic respect for other participants or their arguments..
6. Explicit respect. The speaker directs personal and party appraisals towards other participants or their arguments.

Inappropriate speech

The use of inappropriate speech in the discussions is not an element contributing to deliberation. Frequently the use of such speech takes the attention of the speakers away from the essence of the arguments and the debate. The inappropriate speech used even in a milder form mostly undermines the arguments of the speaker, polarizes the situation on the session and defocuses the attention of the participants away from the topic of the discussion and in that way disables rational review and interpretation of the arguments. This category has four values in the adapted Discourse Quality Index:

1. No inappropriate/insulting/unsuitable speech
2. There is inappropriate/insulting/unsuitable speech towards a person
3. There is inappropriate/insulting/unsuitable speech towards arguments
4. Hate speech, the speaker uses language which offends, undervalues, and degrades the opponents based on their political, ethnic, religious, gender affiliation.

Interruption

This category enables identification of the extent to which the speakers of the observed sessions can freely, without interjections and interruptions state their attitudes and claims. Thereby, an interruption is considered each interruption during the speech lasting longer than several seconds (10 seconds), including longer interjections or cutting into the speech.

1. No interruption. All speeches are included here with no interruption as well as the act of speech which is shortly interrupted (if the interruption lasts no more than several seconds)
2. There is an interruption. When the speaker is interrupted by another MP and the interruption lasts more than several seconds (over 10 seconds). Thereby, if the interruption lasts longer and is not limited only to interjection, it should be considered and coded as a separate speech.



Limitation

The ideal deliberation conditions mean that the participants in a discussion where political decisions are made have an equal possibility to freely express their positions and claims regarding the debate subject within the determined time for discussion. That means that the speakers may physically uninterrupted state their arguments from the rostrums. There are four values in this category in the adapted Discourse Quality Index:

1. No limitation. The speaker freely expresses himself/herself without any limitations.
2. The speaker points or shows that they are prevented by behaviour of the other participants (interruptions, private conversations, faces, yawning).
3. Physical interruption. When the speaker points or it is visible that he/she is physically interrupted by another participant (the microphone has been taken away, forcefully expelled from the room, fight, group of MPS are gathered around the rostrum, loud acclamations, signing).
4. Passive interruption. When the MPs in the room do not actively try to prevent the speech (physically or verbally), but they carry transparencies, shirts with messages, symbols, papers, documents, animals and other objects thus trying to influence the debate).

Gesticulations and body language

The speakers in the discussions often add nonverbal communication to the verbal communication, which includes gesticulations and body language. The participants in such broadcasted discussions often use these additional ways of communication to strengthen the argumentation, to emphasize certain parts of the discussions or to send direct or more subtle messages to the debate participants or to the general public. This category in the Discourse Quality Index tries to encompass this additional or background communication of the speakers. The category has five values:

1. No gesticulations. The speaker talks calmly from his/her place or the rostrum and makes no gesticulations with the arms or the body.
2. Gesticulations supporting the speech.
3. Gesticulates towards the others present on the session.
4. Gesticulates in an insulting manner towards those present on the session (when it can be explicitly noticed that the speaker unequivocally gesticulates in an insulting manner towards those present).
5. The speech is supported by a gesticulation and body language which include demonstration, presentation of... (state the appropriate: shirt with political message, transparent, flier, photography, document, object...)

Adaptation of the Discourse Quality Index

As mentioned above, several adaptations of the original Discourse Quality Index have been done for the needs of this research.

- Several additional categories, such as “partial respect” and “partial disrespect” have been entered in the parts respect towards the other speakers and their arguments. Having into consideration the political culture in the country we consider it extreme if each speech



wherein even for a moment the MPs state disrespect in relation to the other speakers or their arguments should be noted as “disrespect” as determined in the original index. In that direction, two subcategories or transitional categories have been included, which will enable us more precise determination of the relation between the speakers of the parliamentary sessions.

- The category whose purpose is monitoring the gesticulation, i.e. the non-verbal communication of the speakers is amended in the version of the Index used in this research.

Monitored sessions and monitoring method

The observation has encompassed the debates of all Assembly’s plenary sessions in the monitored period from June 2014 to May 2015 and the sessions of the working bodies:

- 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 Local Self-government;
- Committee on European Affairs,
- Legislative Committee.

Method of monitoring the session

The observers monitored and analyzed the speeches of the MPs given on the Assembly’s sessions via several channels:

- Transcripts of plenary sessions posted on the internet site of the Assembly;
- Video recordings of the plenary sessions posted on the internet site of the Assembly;
- Recordings of the discussion in the Assembly’s committees broadcasted on the Assembly TV Channel on the national service Macedonian Radio television (MRTV). The channel usually broadcasts the recordings of the sessions only once, on the day when they are held, without rebroadcasting or posting them later on the Internet. Although IDSCS approached MRTV requesting them to share the recorded sessions of the Committees as a material of public interest for the needs of the monitoring, the public broadcasting service did not accommodate us but redirected the responsibility for sharing these recorded materials to the Assembly. The researchers were denied the material from a large part of the sessions of the committees which after being broadcasted are no longer available to the public. No stenographic notes are taken of the discussions of the working bodies sessions in the Assembly so that the public has virtually no record of the legislative process, the attitudes and arguments of the MPs which are mostly stated in the working bodies of the parliament;
- The Assembly also did not met the requests for sharing the recorded materials from the sessions of the committees with an explanation that only the Assembly TV Channel on the Macedonian Radio Television has such records on disposal;



- For the needs of the observation of the discussions, IDSCS asked the Assembly and the chairs of the observed committees for permission for monitoring the sessions from the galleries in the Assembly during the monitoring period. Neither the President of the Assembly nor the chairs of the committees responded positively to the requests. The IDSCS observers were not given an opportunity to follow the MPs discussions in live.

The political context of the conducted research

The Assembly has the legislative authority and consists of 123 MPs, in accordance with the Constitution. The MPs are elected for a period of four years at direct elections by proportionate elective lists for a four-year mandate.

At the last parliamentary elections held in April 2014, the political party VMRO – DPMNE (International Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity) won 61 seats while their coalition partner, DUI (Democratic Union for Integration) won 19 and together they formed the Government. The parties GROM (Civil option for Macedonia) and NDP (National democratic reform) won one seat each in the Assembly. The MP who got the mandate from NDP, beside the party's decision to boycott the Assembly, became part of the parliamentary group of DUI. Now they have 20 MPs.

In the monitored period from June 2014 to May 2015, the MPs of the biggest opposition coalition led by SDSM (Social-democratic union for Macedonia) which won 34 mandates at the elections, boycotted the work of the Assembly. Ten MPs acted as opposition in the Assembly in this period, seven from DPA (Democratic Party of Albanians) and three from the opposition coalition of SDSM who decided to accept their terms of office.

The majority in the Assembly in November started a procedure for revoking the mandates of 31 opposition MPs who had been boycotting the parliament but the procedure dragged in a period of several months and was not completed.

In the period after the early parliamentary elections held in April 2014, the opposition leader Zoran Zaev in several public performances announced publishing an informative “bombs” because of which the Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski would have been forced to resign. On the 31st January on a press conference, Gruevski accused Zaev of espionage and collaborating with foreign secret services and of blackmailing him on four face-to-face meetings with records of conversations and asking for forming a technical government. At the same time, the police conducted an action named “Puch” (Coup) suspecting four people, including Zaev, of espionage and violence over high state officials, violence over state organs and endangering the state order and the democratic institutions. Three people were arrested in the action and Zaev had his passport taken away. On 9th February 2015, the SDSM leader Zaev on a press conference started publishing the so-called “bombs”, i.e. audio tapes of alleged wiretappings of high officials pointing to possible breach of several laws and election irregularities. The opposition claimed that the tapes were made by years-long wiretapping of approximately 20 thousand citizens ordered by the state secret services.



On 30th March the representatives of two biggest political parties, VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM met in Brussels to negotiate resolving the political crisis mediated by three representatives of the European Parliament. The leaders of both parties repeated the negotiations on 15th April, however just like the first time, no solution nor change in the political situation were agreed on the meetings. The political crisis further spread in May. On 5th May, SDSM held one more press conference publishing audio tapes of conversations among high state officials including the Minister of Interior, Gordana Jankulovska, the Director of the Security and Counter Intelligence, Sasho Mijalkov and the Prime Minister, Nikola Gruevski, regarding the “Neshkovski” case.

The “Neshkovski” case refers to a murder of a 21-year-old boy Martin Neshkovski committed by a member of the police in the evening of 6th June 2011 at the city square in Skopje during VMRO-DPMNE celebration for re-winning the parliamentary elections. The published conversations refer to possible hiding of the investigation the high officials knew of. After the press conference, several thousand people protested in front of the Government building demanding resignation, whereas the same evening when the police came to remove them from there, there was a clash between the police and the protestors leaving around ten people injured. The protests demanding governmental resignation continued in the following days in a calm atmosphere.

On 8th May, the party DOM (Democratic renewal of Macedonia) which has one MP (Liljana Popovska) in the Assembly decided to leave the governing coalition. According to the party, that way they would contribute to relieving the tense situation on the political stage.

Early in the morning on 9th May in a suburb of the town of Kumanovo, located in the northern part of the country, an armed conflict occurred during a police action between an armed group for which the police initially informed to be a terrorist group consisting of ethnic Albanians. In a fierce shooting that lasted more than 24 hours, 8 members of the police special forces were killed as well as 14 members of the armed group, according to MOI, which later was said to be a criminal one. The events made the public fear a possible fuelling of an armed inter-ethnic conflict which caused a more serious engagement in the attempts by the representatives of the international community, firstly the European Union and the United States of America to resolve the crisis.

The anti-government protests reached the peak with a big peaceful gathering of the opposition parties and the civil movements on 17th May in front of the governmental building. Following the protest, the opposition raised tents and set a camp on the street in front of the Government. The governing party VMRO-DPMNE also held a big peaceful gathering in front of the Assembly’s building the next day. After the gathering was finished, the supporters of the governing party also set a camp in the park across the Assembly’s building claiming that they defended the democracy, i.e. the government elected at the parliamentary elections. On 18th and 26th May two more meetings took place among the leaders of the four biggest political parties in Macedonia. The purpose thereof was finding a solution for the political crisis; however these meetings failed in finding a solution for the current political situation. On 2nd June, the leaders of the four biggest political parties with the mediation of the EU Enlargement Commissioner, Johannes Hahn, finally reached an agreement which additionally after a new meeting on 15th July was précised by a so-called Protocol to the Agreement from 2nd June. The contract contains a series of measures with explicit deadlines which should assist in overcoming the political crisis developed after publishing the wiretappings. The measures refer to the opposition returning in the



Assembly, organization of new parliamentary elections, resignation of the current government before the elections, formation of a government where ministers from the opposition would be appointed in the key ministries, reforms in the elective legislation, establishment of a special public prosecution office with a mandate to investigate the finding from the published recordings. On 1st September the opposition returned in the Assembly and now it operates in full composition.

Meanwhile, between the Agreement from 2nd July and the protocol from 15th July, an expert team engaged by the European Committee led by Reinhard Pribe, former Director of the EU Directorate for Western Balkan prepared a detailed report⁶ on the problems in several areas, such as the legislative system, control over the operations of the security services, problems in organizing elections, the condition of the media and directions for reforms in all these areas for the purpose of improve the situation. The report has been submitted to the Assembly and serves as a guide in implementing the reforms in the stated areas.

Part 1

Findings of the Assembly's monitoring

Totally 2271 speeches of MPs given on 121 sessions were analyzed in the period from June 2014 to May 2015, in the observation of the quality of the debate in the Assembly. Of which 74 were plenary sessions, and 47 were sessions of committees in the Assembly.

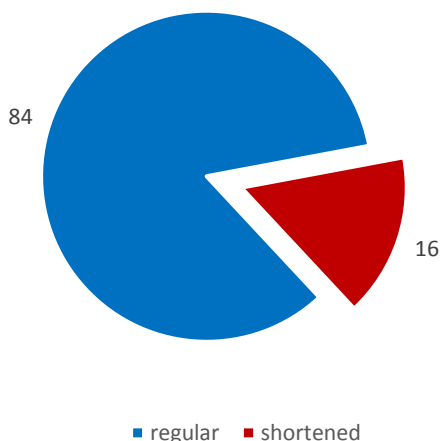
The following sessions of the working bodies were monitored: Financing and Budget Committee, Committee on European Affairs, Legislative Committee, Committee on the Political System and Inter-Ethnic Relations, Committee on Constitutional Issues, Committee on Election and Appointment Issues and Committee on Local Self-government.

84% of the total number of monitored speeches were given on issues which were considered in a regular procedure, and 16% in shortened procedure.

⁶The report is known in the public as the "Pribe's Report". The original title is "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Recommendations of the group of experienced experts on the systematic issues of rule of law related to monitoring the communications revealed in spring 2015" http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/news_corner/news/news-files/20150619_recommendations_of_the_senior_experts_group.pdf

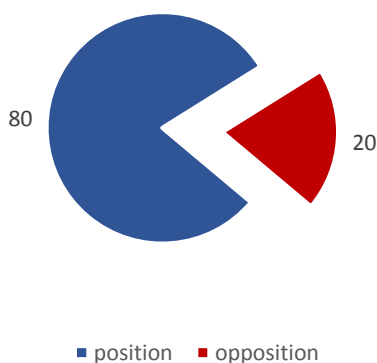


Procedure in which the speeches are given (%)



According to the political affiliation of the speakers, 80% of the total discussions belonged to the MPs which were part of the governing majority while 20% to the members of the opposition. For such distribution of the discussions it should be taken into consideration that 31 of the elected opposition MPs from the coalition led by SDSM boycotted the work of the parliament in the monitored period. In that period 10 MPs acted as opposition in the Assembly, 7 of which belong to DPA and three were independent MPs.

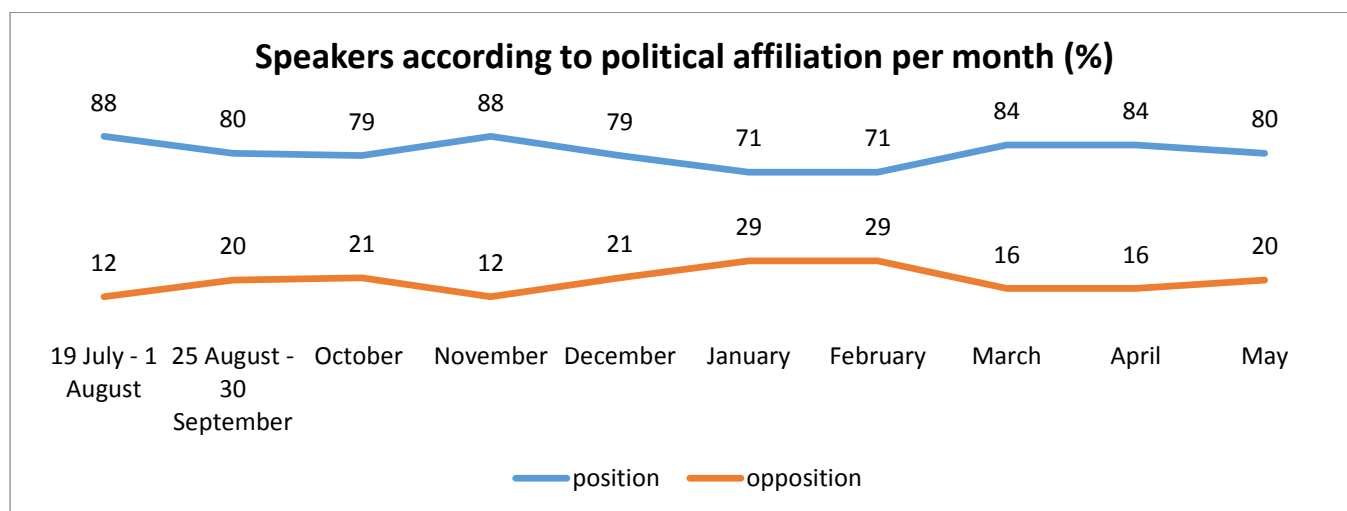
Speakers according to political affiliation (%)



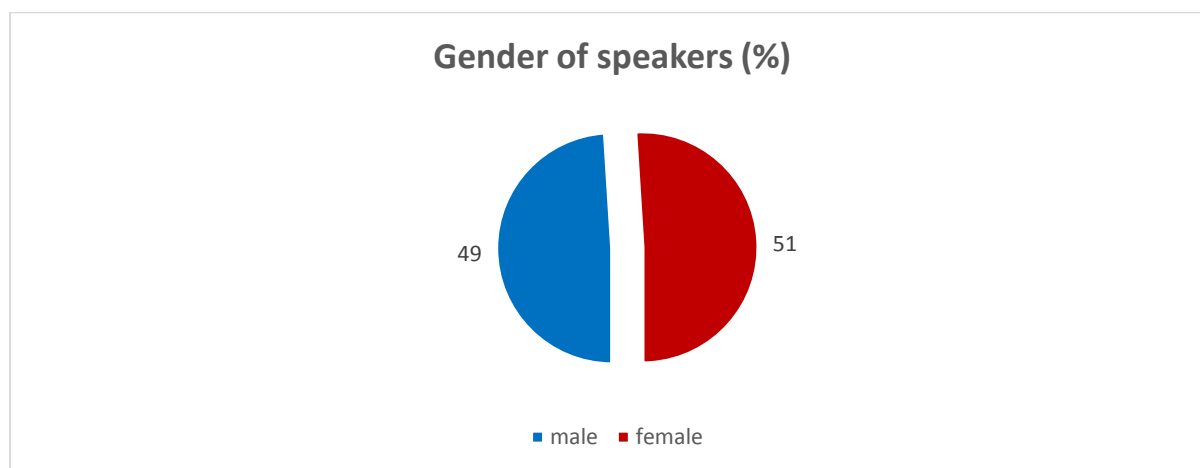
Participation of the opposition MPs changed throughout the observed period. The lowest level was noticed at the sessions held in the period between 19th June and 1st August 2014 when only 12% of the discussion belonged to the opposition MPs. The highest level was noticed in the period between January and February 2015 when the opposition reached 29% of the total discussions. That was greatly



because of the heavy arguments on several laws which at that time were in parliamentary procedure including the Draft Law on modifications to the Law on Higher Education.



According to the gender of the speakers, the women MPs were responsible for most of the discussions although at that time they consisted 35% of the overall composition of the Assembly. 51% of the discussions belonged to the women while 49% to the men MPs.



The ethnic Albanian MPs consisted 30% of the Assembly's composition at the observed sessions in the period between June 2014 and May 2015. Their participation in the discussions on 121 sessions amounted in 12%. 85% of the discourses belonged to the ethnic Macedonian MPs while 3% to the MPs of other ethnic affiliations.

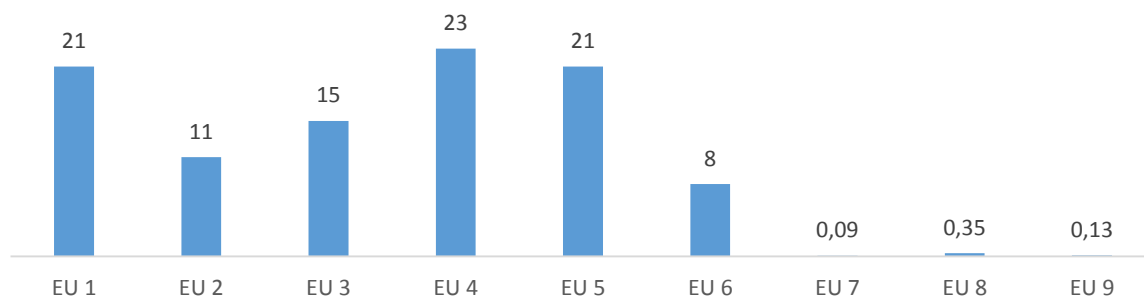


Speakers according to ethnicity (%)



During the monitored period of ten months the participation of the MPs on the observed sessions varied depending on which electoral unit they come from. It can be concluded from the full data of all analyzed discussions at 121 sessions that out of the six electoral units on the territory of Macedonia, the most active were the speakers from the fourth electoral unit. They were followed by the MPs from the first and fifth electoral units, and the least discussions were registered by the MPs elected in sixth electoral unit on the 2014 elections. Three MPs elected in three electoral units abroad, EU7, EU8 and EU9 together participated in less than 1% on the monitored sessions.

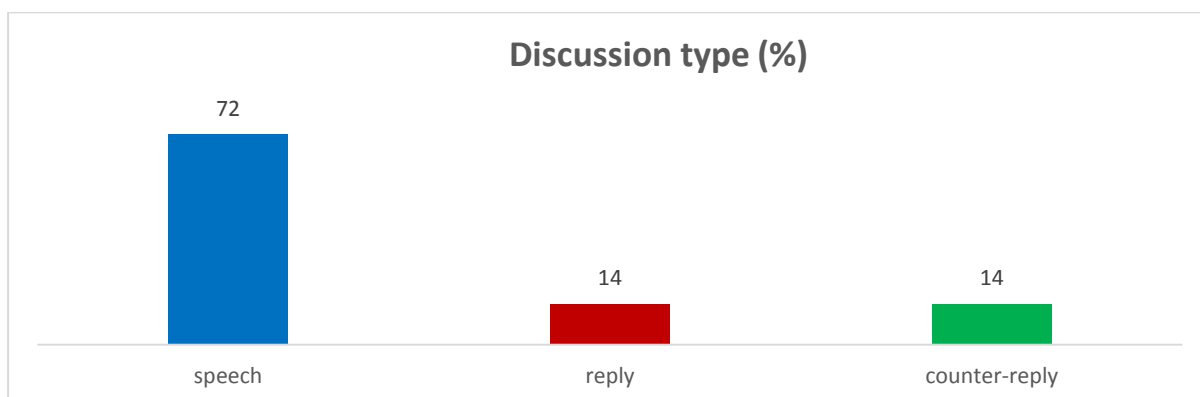
Share in discussions according to Electoral units (%)



Type of discussion

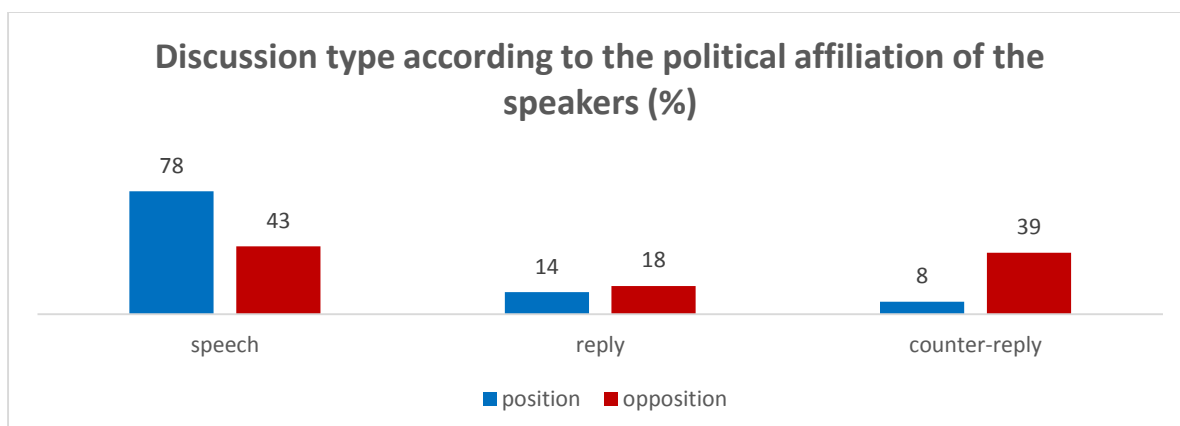
According to the type of discussions, 72% of the cases were speeches, i.e. discussions which may last 10 minutes according to the Assembly's Book of rules. Out of the remaining discussions, 14% were replicas to the speeches limited to 3 minutes, 14% were contra replicas, i.e. answers to replicas limited to 1 minute.

The big difference between the speeches and the replicas points out that big part of the speeches given on the Assembly's session in this period were without any answer. That means that the reliability and the quality of numerous arguments stated in the speeches was not tested, challenged or disputed in any manner, thus missing the possibility for them to be possibly amended or improved by other arguments in a direction of making better laws for the common good of all citizens.



If the data on the discussion type are considered through the prism of political affiliation of the speakers, it results that 78% of the discussions of the governing MPs were speeches. There were significantly less replies, i.e. 14%, and only 8% of the total number of discussions of the MPs were counter-replies.

The structure with the opposition MPs is different. Out of the total number of opposition discussions, 43% were speeches, 18% were replies and 39% were counter-replies.



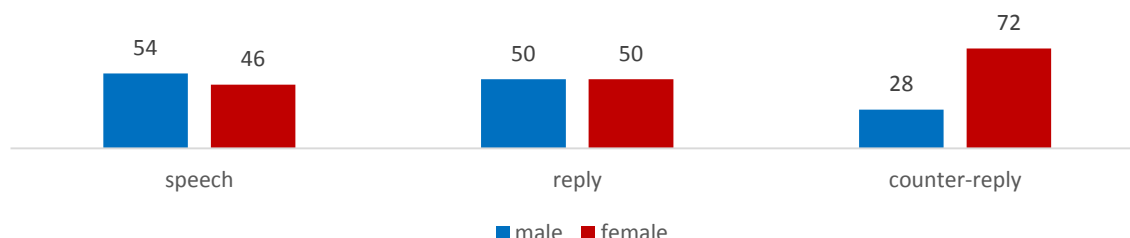
As we have stated above, 51% of the total discussions on the monitored sessions in the period between June 2014 and May 2015 belonged to women MPs. If we review the MPs participation according to their gender in three different types of discussion on the sessions, the result is that the male MPs have a slightly higher share in the 10-minute speeches, i.e. 54% against 46% of the women MPs.

The groups were equal according to their share in the replies, i.e. 50% of these discussions belonged to both men and women, which followed as reply to the speeches and could last up to 3 minutes. However, there is an interesting fact that the women MPs dominated in the counter-replies with their participation, 72% of these discussions belong to them, which followed as reply to the replies and could be interpreted as deepening of the discussion about one topic for which the MPs debate.

This leads to a conclusion that the women in the Assembly in the monitored period had an important role in deepening the discussion about part of the topics which were on the agenda.

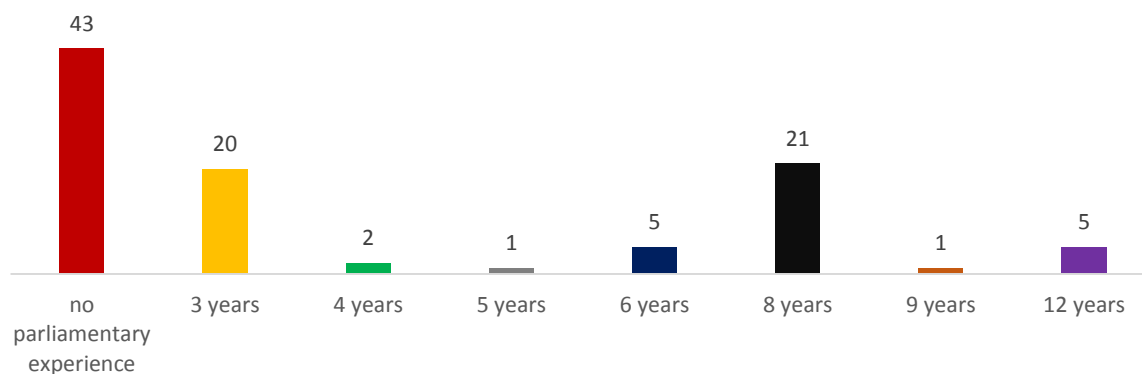


Share in the discussion type according to the gender of the speakers(%)

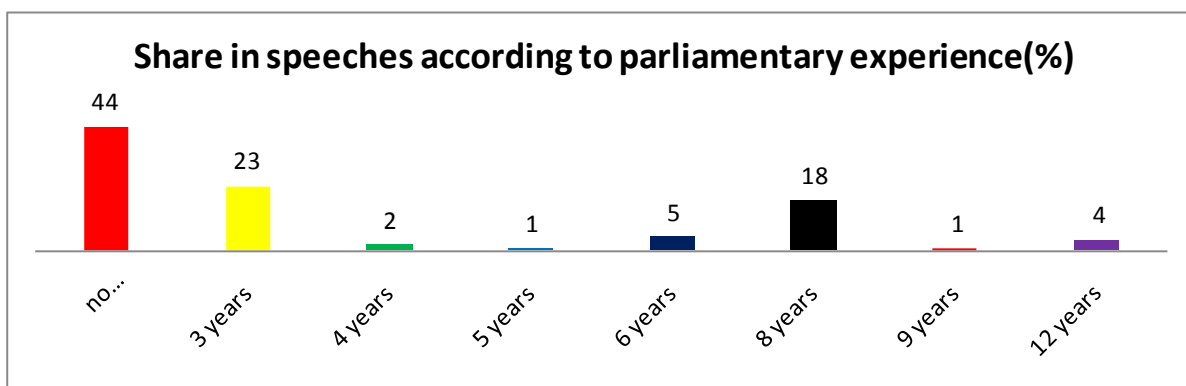


If we analyze the discussion participation according to the parliamentary experience of the speakers it can be concluded that most frequent speakers in the monitored period were those with the first mandate in the parliament, i.e. who did not have a previous experience as MPs. 43% of the total discussions belonged to “new” MPs. On second place were the MPs with a second mandate in the Assembly and 20% of the discussions belonged to them. The third place was for the speakers who have already had two mandates as MPs and 21% of the discussions belonged to them. 5% of the discussions belonged to MPs with 12-year experience which is the longest term of office with this composition of the Assembly.

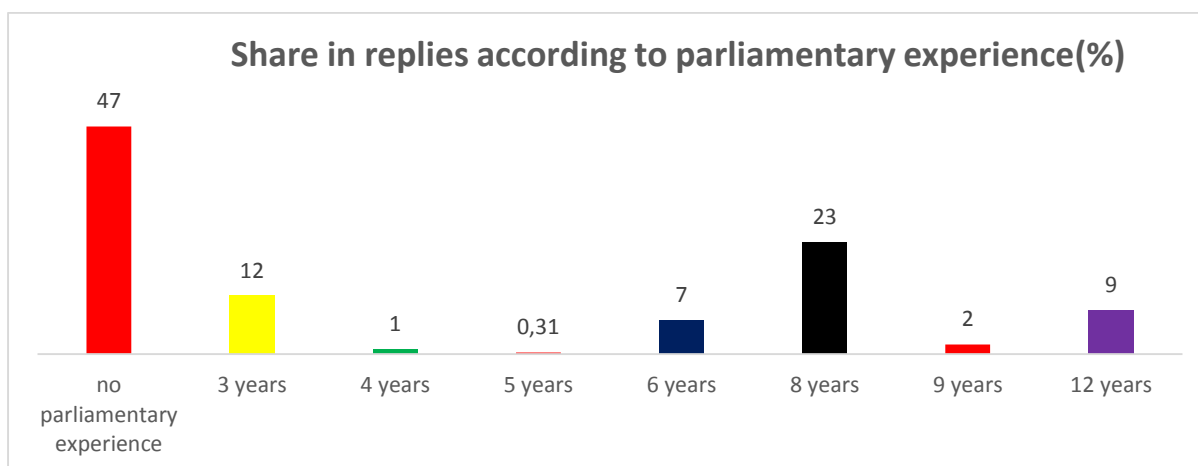
Speakers according to the parliamentary experience (%)



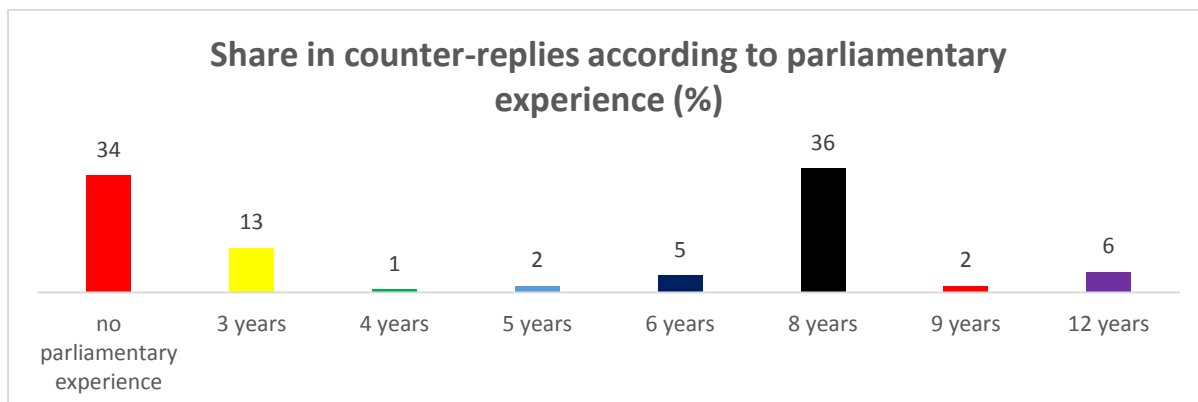
The separate discussion analysis according to their type, i.e. whether it concerns a speech, reply or counter-reply points that in the monitored period most of the speeches, 44%, were given by MPs in their first mandate. Second were the MPs who were in the Assembly for 3 years, followed by those with 8-year experience.



It is similar with the replies, i.e. most of these discussions, 44% belonged to the “new” MPs. However, on the second place with 23% were the MPs with previous 8-year experience. The MPs with a second mandate were on the third place with 12%.



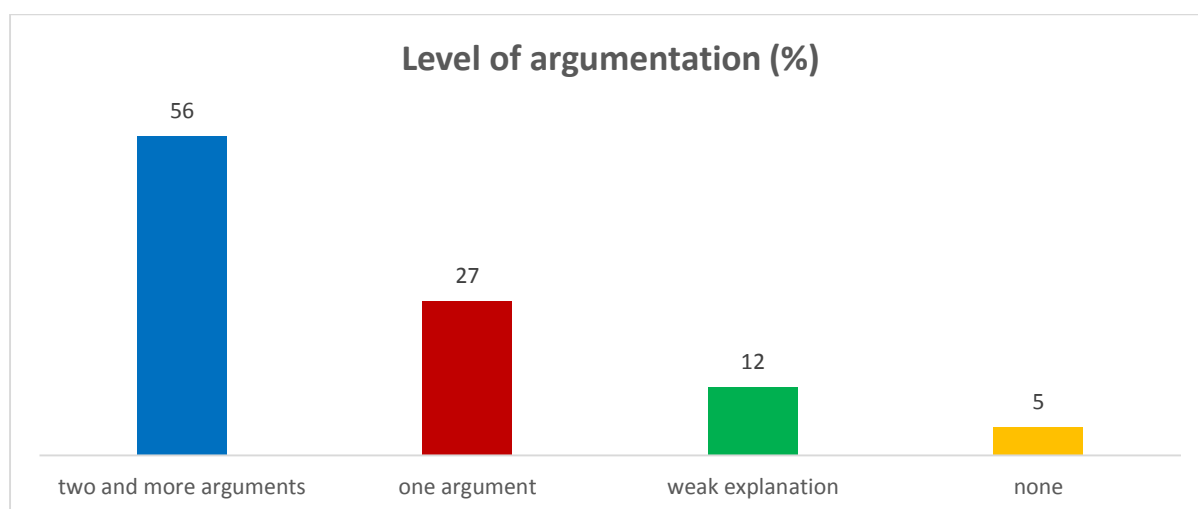
The situation is different with the counter-replies. The more experienced MPs with 8-year experience had the biggest participation in these discussions in the Assembly to who 36% of the cases belonged. The “new” MPs with 34% participation of the total number of counter-replies were on the second place. The MPs with a previous 3-year experience in the parliament were on the third place.





Level of argumentation in Assembly's discussions

In 56% of the MPs discussion it was identified that they explained their positions and attitudes with at least two arguments. One argument was identified in 27% of the discussions. In 12% the explanation given by an MP in their discussion was considered weak. The weak explanation means that the MP stated a position regarding the discussed subject, but not a full argument was identified in the explanation. In 5% of the monitored discussions on the sessions no arguments were identified.



If we analyze how many arguments were given according to the type of discussion, it can be concluded that when the MPs gave a speech with a possible 10-minute duration, in 66% of the cases they explained their positions with at least two arguments. In 21% of the speeches, the MPs had one argument, while in 10% they had weak explanation. In 3% the speakers had no argument.

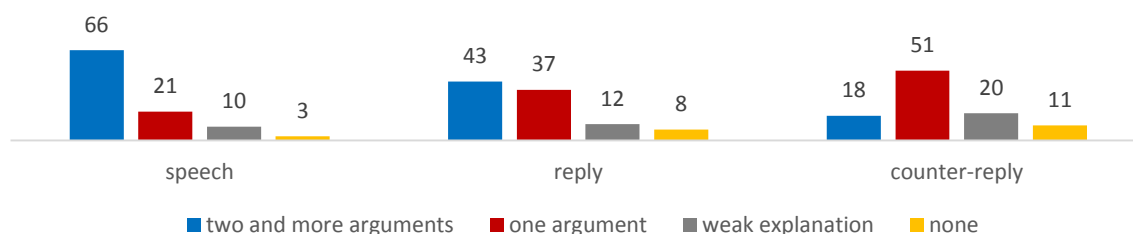
When they had a possibility for replies lasting up to 3 minutes, in 47% of the cases they gave two arguments while in 37% one. In 12% of the replies, the speakers had a weak explanation and in 8% they had no explanation.

In the counter-replies lasting 1 minute, in 18% of the cases the speakers stated two arguments. In 51% of the counter-replies, the MPs had one argument, while in 20% they had weak explanation. In 11% of the counter-replies, the speakers had no explanation.

The gradual reduction of the number of arguments in the replies and counter-replies compared to the speeches may be interpreted as a consequence of the lesser time the MPs had at disposal to state their positions and arguments. On the other hand, it is expected that a deepening of the discussion about a topic through replies and counter-replies would gradually narrow down the number of arguments. The MPs in the speeches stated more arguments, but in the replies and counter-replies they were more directed towards denying or amending and further explaining the most important arguments. It is a process where the speakers had a possibility to challenge their arguments and positions and ideally that can serve as a filter where the weaker arguments would fall off, and those with the strongest basis would remain.



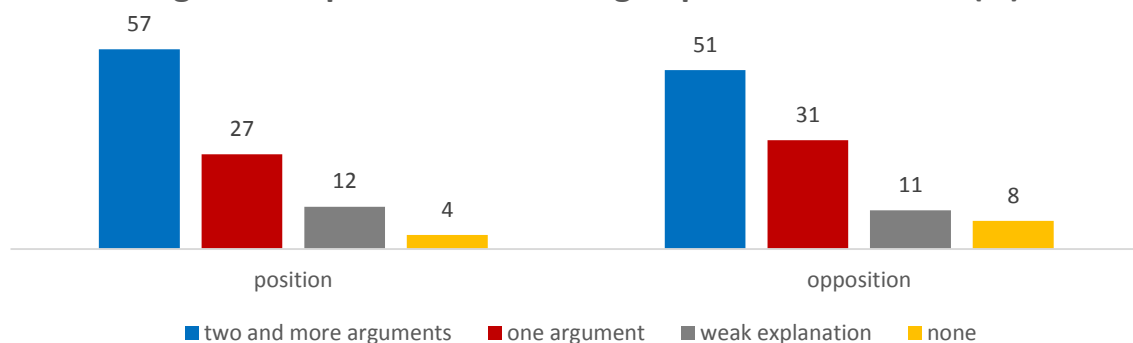
Level of argumentation according to the type of discussion (%)



If the level of argumentation is examined according to the political affiliation of the speakers, it results is similar for the members of both options in the Assembly. Two or more arguments were used in 57% of the total number of discussion of the governing majority MPs. In 27% the governing speakers had one argument, and in 12% the explanation was regarded as weak. In 4% of the discussions of the majority, there was no explanation.

Two and more arguments were identified in 51% of the discussions of the opposition MPs, one argument in 31%. In 11% of the opposition member discussions not one argument was identified while in 8% of the cases there was no explanation.

Degree of explanation according to political affiliation (%)



On whose behalf are the arguments

The range of the explanation in the discussions of the MPs enables us to see if the speakers in the monitored Assembly's sessions related their arguments to some benefits or consequences for certain groups, for parts or for the entire society. In other words, it enables us to see on whose behalf the MPs claimed that they stated their arguments and positions.

On the monitored sessions, in 6% of the discussions the MPs related their arguments to abstract principles such as social justice, peace, welfare, etc.

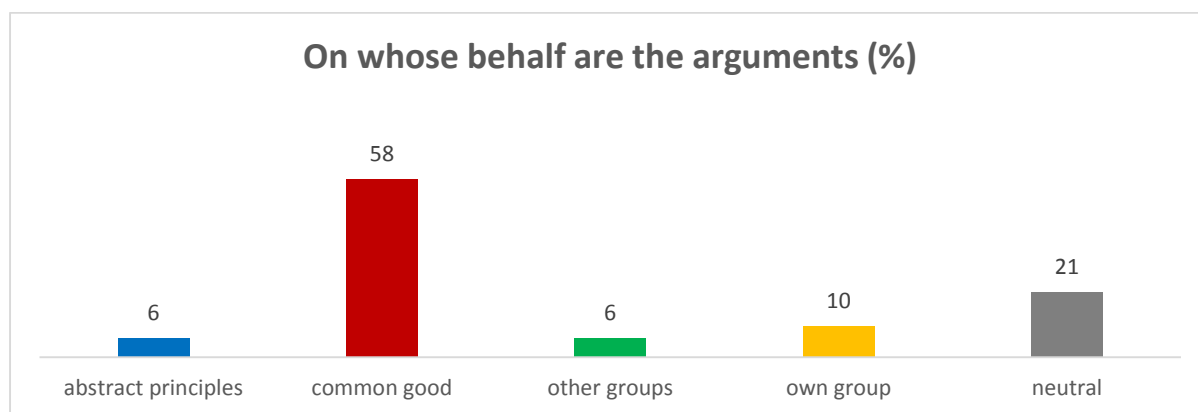


In 58% of the discussions the MPs related their arguments to the common good of all citizens in the country.

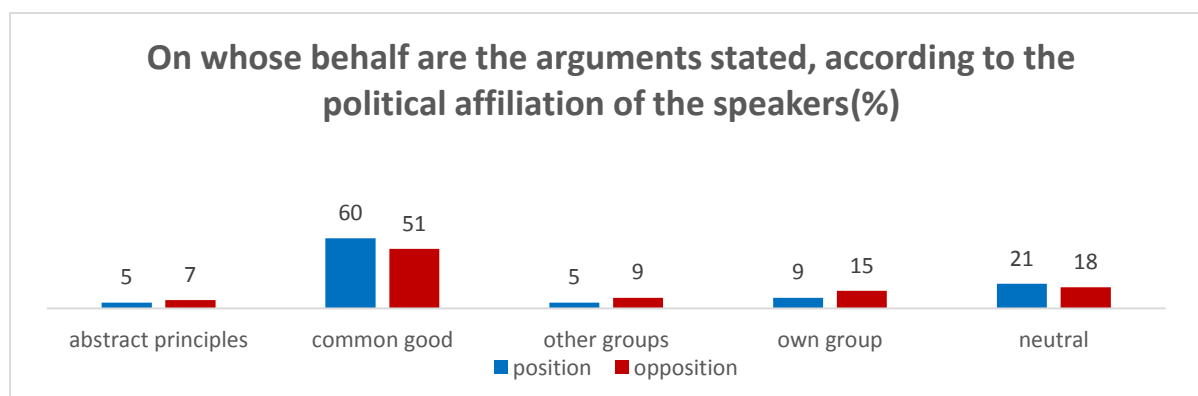
In 6% the MPs related their arguments to the benefits or consequences for other groups. This includes the political, ethnic, religious, social and professional groups which are different than those the speaker belongs to or identifies himself/herself with.

In 10% the speakers related the arguments to benefits or consequences for their political, ethnic, religious, social or professional group.

In 21% of the cases the speakers on the Assembly's sessions were neutral, i.e. did not related their arguments to consequences or benefits for any group in the society.



If this category is considered according to the political affiliation of the speakers it can be concluded that both the position and opposition MPs mostly related their arguments to the benefits or consequences to the common good of all citizens. However, the position speakers did this more often than the opposition. The MPs belonging to the majority were neutral in 21% of the discussions, i.e. they did not relate their arguments to any group in the society. The opposition MPs did that in 17% of their discussions. The opposition MPs more frequently related their arguments to their group whereas it mostly referred to ethnic groups. They also more frequently addressed other groups and abstract principles compared to the MPs of the governing majority.





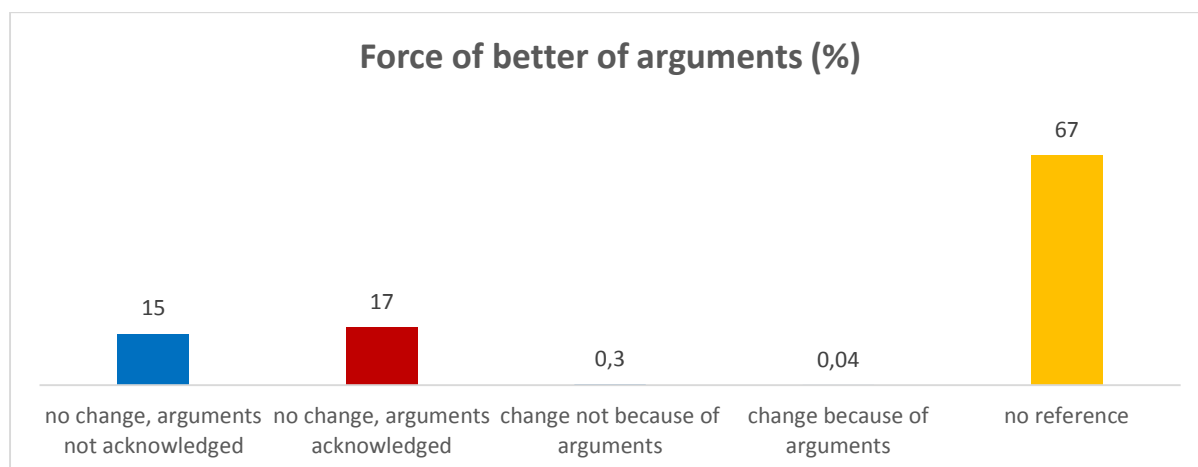
Force of a better argument

The category *Force of a better argument* enables us to see the openness of the MPs in the discussions to the arguments of other speakers and possible changes in the positions as a result of better quality arguments stated by the other speakers in the debates.

During the 10-month monitoring of the Assembly's sessions only in one case it was noticed that the speaker changed his/her own position due to better quality argument stated by another speaker from a different political option. In seven cases it was noticed that during the discussion the MPs have changed their position, but did not point to the reasons for doing so.

In high 67% of the discussions the speakers did not state any arguments for the other participants in the discussions.

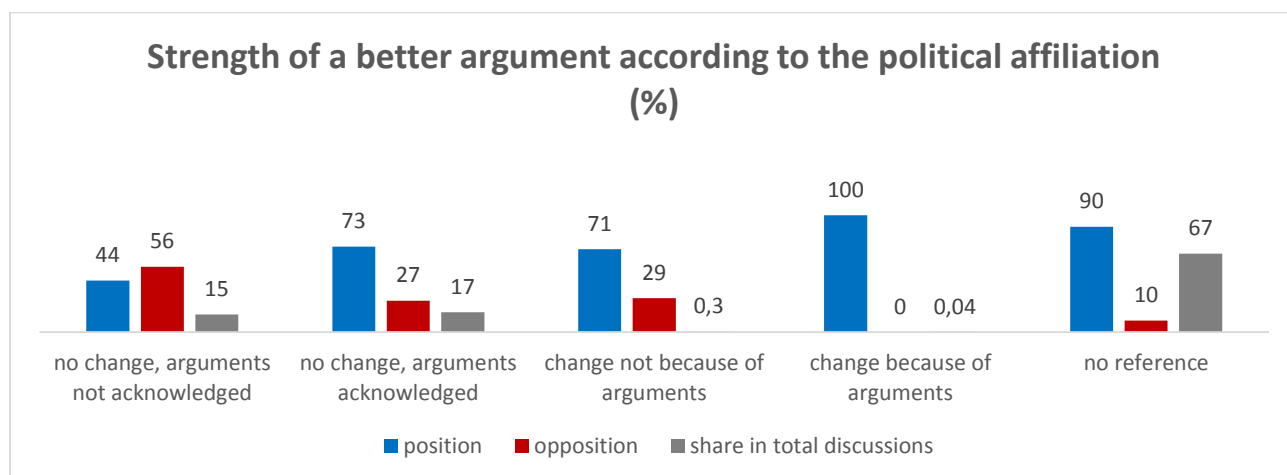
In 17% of the cases the speakers did not change their position but acknowledged the value of the arguments given by the other speakers. Most of this percentage belonged to MPs from the same political options which mutually acknowledged the value of the arguments and frequently acted from similar or same positions. They acknowledged the value of the arguments of their party members and did not change their position because it was the same with the one of the speaker whose value of arguments they acknowledged. In rare cases the MPs have acknowledged the value of the argument of another speaker or speakers from an opposite political option.



If the data on the strength of a better argument are analyzed from a political affiliation of the speakers, then the following image for the discussion in the Assembly is obtained. 90% of the speeches without any overview of the arguments of the other MPs belonged to the MPs of the governing majority who at that period were 82 in number. Same time, most of the discussions, i.e. 73% where the speakers did not change their position, but acknowledged the value of the given arguments belong to the MPs of the majority. As we have stated above, that was most often a case of MPs from the same political option that mutually supported their arguments and practically acted from the same position.



At the same time, most of the discussions not acknowledging the value of the arguments of the others belonged to the 10 MPs⁷ which comprised the opposition in the monitored period.



Beside the difference regarding the political option of the MP, there was a difference in the attitude towards the value of the argument of other speakers also if analyzed by the gender of the speakers. So, the women MPs more frequently failed to change their position and did not acknowledge the value of the arguments of the other MPs, 65%, compared to the men. The women more frequently acknowledged the value of the arguments of the other speakers, but did not change their position, 57%. In percentage, they also changed their position more frequently than the men, but did not explained the reason for doing so, but this category comes down to only several cases, i.e. insufficient for having a greater effect on the overall data.

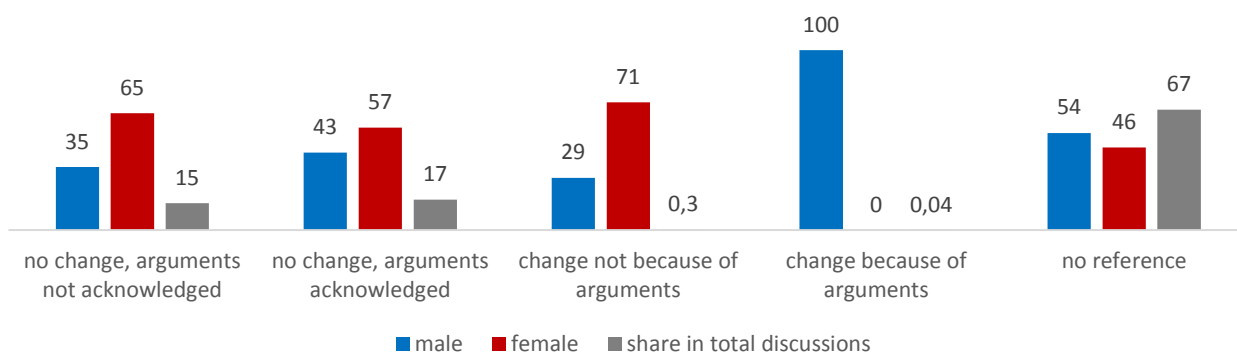
On the other hand, the men more often had discussions where they did not refer to the arguments of the other speakers. This indicates that the women MPs more often commented the arguments of the other speakers, and the men more often had tendencies to inform, i.e. not to refer to arguments of the others.

This data correlate to the data that the women in the Assembly got into discussions by replicas and contra replicas more often than the men. In any case, the reticence towards arguments of the other speakers may be concluded with both groups as well as general unpreparedness for acknowledging the values of such arguments, and their possible acknowledgement which would cause change in their position about a certain topic.

⁷The opposition in the period from April 2014 to September 2015 consisted of 10 MPs, 7 of which belonged to DPA and 3 independent who left the opposition coalition led by SDSM. The remaining 31 opposition MPs from the elections in April 2014 to September 2015 boycotted the work of the Assembly because, as they accused, elective manipulation by the governing coalition led by VMRO-DPMNE and DUI.



Force of better arguments according to the gender of speakers (%)



There was a group change in the positions of the parliamentary groups in the observed period of the assembly sessions. The MPs of the governing majority changed the position about the changes in the Law on Higher Education when shortly after its adoption they also adopted postponement of its application. This group change of position was not notified in the monitoring because it was not a result of the Assembly's debates. The majority in the Assembly first adopted the Law defending the proposal of the Government on the modification to the Law on Higher Education. Ten days later the same MPs accepted the new proposal of the Government on the modifications to the Law on Higher Education in a shorten procedure which postponed the enforcement of the provisions of the Law and required additional time for gathering new proposals for, as stated, "improving the quality of the higher education". The reason for the change of position was the agreement between the Government and the representatives of the University Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Studentski Plenum (Student Plenum) and Profesorski Plenum (Professor Plenum) after the negotiations that took place in the Rector's Office of the University in Skopje (UKIM)⁸. That means that this change in the position of the Assembly's majority was not a result of a well-argued discussion between the MPs but rather a agreement reached between the Government and the representatives of the student and professor movements which opposed part of the provisions in the Law. The MPs in this case did not offer quality argumentation for the change but only conducted contract in the legislative house.

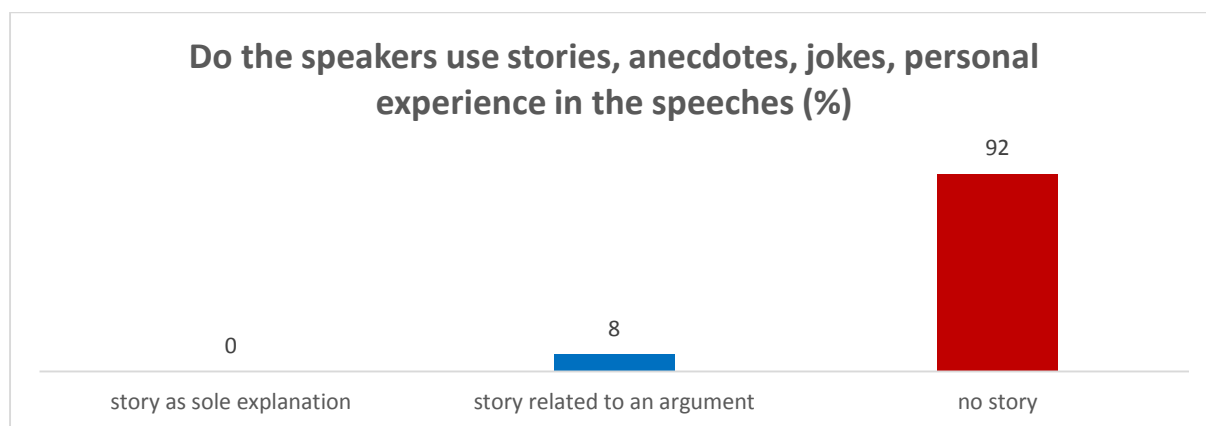
Use of stories in the discussions

The stories, personal testimonies, anecdotes or jokes were rarely used in the discussions of the monitored sessions in the Assembly. These expression forms may deepen the argumentation by offering illustrative examples by which the MPs may more precisely demonstrate the essence of the arguments which explain their positions to the co-speakers and the public. On the other hand, the stories, testimonies, anecdotes or jokes may also be used for defocusing the discussion away from a subject that is to be discussed. However, the MPs used some of these expressive forms in only 8% of the overall discussions, in the monitored period of the sessions. In all cases when the stories were

⁸The Assembly debate and the events regarding the Law on Higher Education are analyzed in the project Assembly under scrutiny as a special case in "Report on monitoring the discussion on the modifications on the Law on Higher Education" available on the following link: <http://idscs.org.mk/mk/tekovni-proekti/sobranieto-pod-lupa/747-sobranieto-pod-lupa-izveshtaj-od-monitoring-na-diskusija-za-izmeni-na-zakon-za-visoko-obrazovanie>.



used, the MPs used them as an addition to the arguments. There was not a single case when a story, testimony, anecdote or joke was used independently as an only explanation.

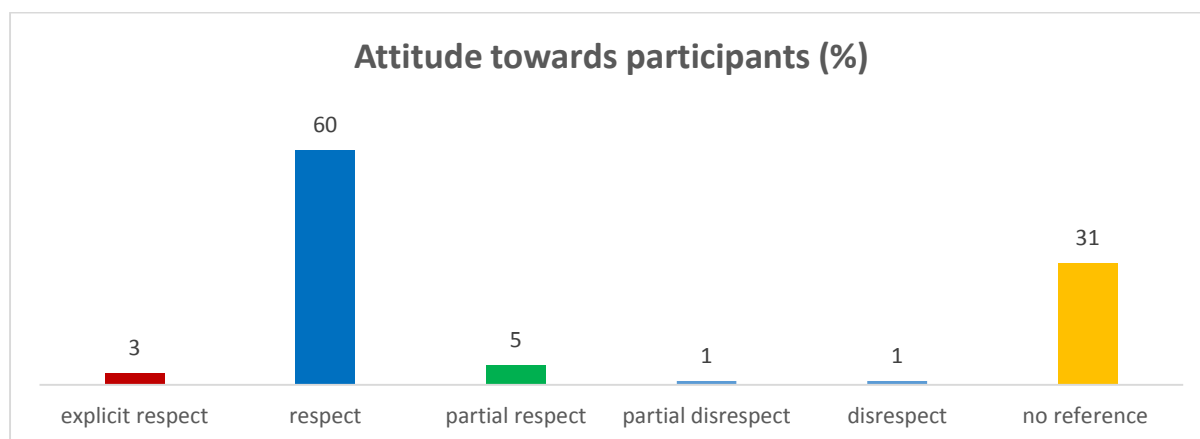


Attitude towards the participants

Considering the attitude of the MPs towards the other speakers and participants on the monitored sessions, two tendencies prevailed. The first is that the MPs in most of the discussions, 60%, showed basic respect towards the other speakers and participants. The second is that in 31% of the discussions the speakers did not display any attitude towards the other participants in the sessions. Only in small part, i.e. in 1% of the cases, a complete disrespect was shown towards the other participants. Those were cases when the MPs in most of the discussions showed disrespect by attacking the personality or the party affiliation of the other participants.

Partial disrespect was shown only in 1% of the cases, i.e. the speakers in these discussions in one part directed attacks towards the personality of the other MPs, but in other part were neutral or showed respect towards them. Partial respect was identified in 5% of the cases, i.e. the speakers in the biggest part of the discussions showed respect or were neutral, but in a smaller part addressed attacks towards the personality of the other participants in the sessions.

Explicit respect was identified in 3% of the cases, i.e. the speakers addressed appraisals for the personality of the other participants in the debates.

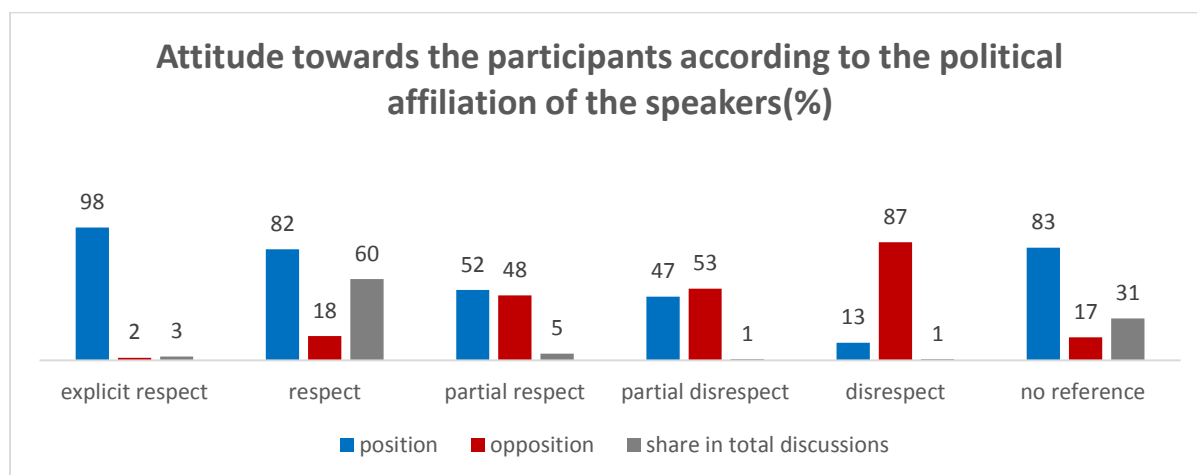




If the attitude towards the other participants is reviewed according to the political option of the speakers it turns out that the explicit respect cases, i.e. 98%, and respect to the other participants, i.e. 82%, mostly belonged to the MPs which are part of the governing majority. The biggest part of the discussion where no attitude towards the other participants was expressed, i.e. 82% belonged to these MPs.

There is a complete disrespect in 1% of the total discussions, but it can be noticed that it mostly belonged to the opposition MPs, i.e. 87%. The bigger part, i.e. 53% of cases of partial disrespect belonged to the opposition MPs while 47% to the governing MPs.

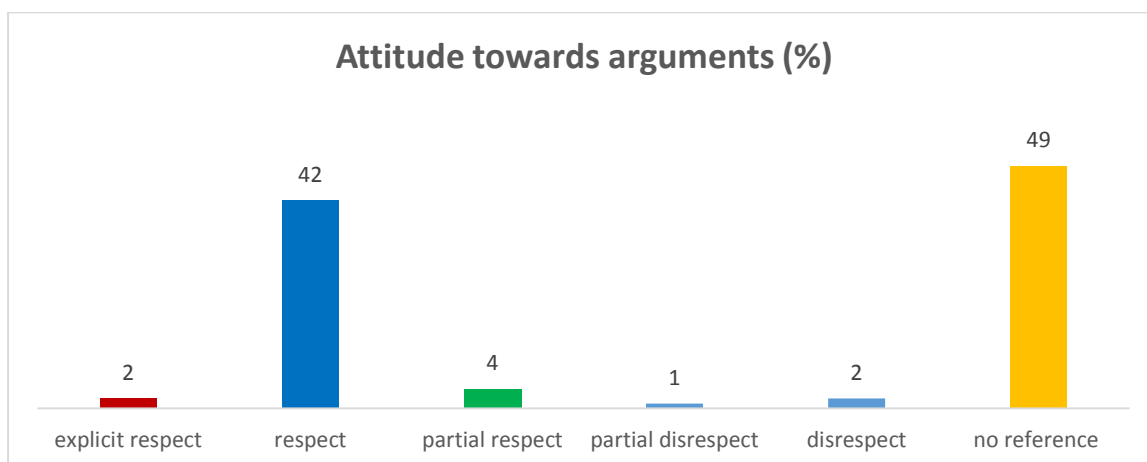
The discussions where partial respect was identified belonged almost equally to the governing and opposition MPs, i.e. 52% and 48% respectively.



Attitude towards arguments

The speakers in most of the cases were neutral, i.e. in 49% of the cases they did not express attitude towards the arguments stated by the other speakers on the monitored sessions in the period from June 2014 to May 2015.

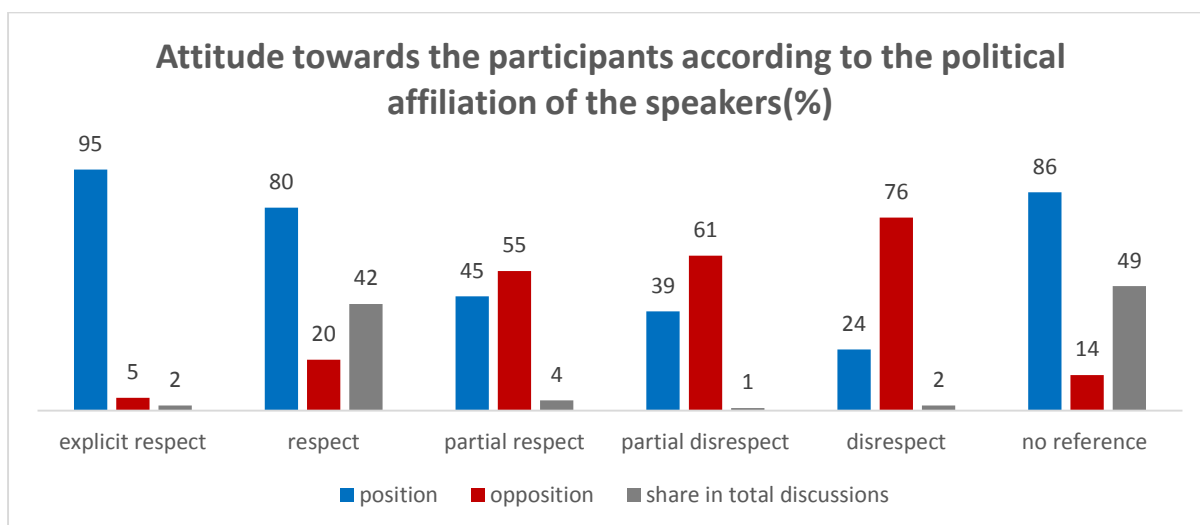
Expressing respect towards the arguments of the other speakers was identified in 42% of the discussions. However, the stated respect mostly referred to the arguments given by the speakers belonging to the same political options and less towards the arguments of the speakers from different or opposing political options.



If this relation is considered from the aspect of the political affiliation of the speakers it can be concluded that in the dominant part (86% of the discussions) where no attitude was displayed towards the arguments of the other speakers belonged to the MPs of the governing majority. Most of the discussions (80%) where a respect was shown towards the arguments of the other speakers belonged to them as well. When it comes to respect, the discussions where the MPs from the same political option showed mutual respect towards the arguments and rarely towards the arguments of the different political options are mostly involved.

Similar to the respect towards the personality of the other participants in the session, it was the same with the respect towards the arguments, the number of discussions with complete disrespect was low. That is only 2% of the total discussions, but they were mostly stated by the opposition MPs, i.e. 76%, and less by the governing MPs, i.e. 24%. Partial respect was identified in 4% of the cases. The discussions where the speaker in most of their speech expressed respect or neutrality towards the arguments of the other speakers and in a lesser part expressed disrespect were identified as partial respect. The larger part, i.e. 55% of these discussions belonged to the opposition MPs and 45% to the governing MPs.

Discussions where partial disrespect was identified consisted 1% of the total discussions and most of them, i.e. 76% belonged to the opposition MPs, and a lesser part, 24%, to the governing MPs.



Two tendencies can be identified from the data on the attitude of the speakers towards the other participants and towards their arguments. Most of the neutral discussions not stating any relation towards other speakers and their arguments belonged to the MPs of the governing majority. Most of the discussions where disrespect or elements of disrespect were shown towards other speakers and their arguments belonged to the opposition MPs.

As we have noticed above in the part “Strength of a better argument”, the dominant part of the discussions where the speakers does not addressed at all the value of the arguments of other speakers belonged to the governing majority MPs as well. Previously in the part on the “Type of discussions” we concluded that according to the type of discussions, the speeches prevailed with the governing majority MPs, while the counter-replies with the opposition MPs.

If we take into consideration that in the period between June 2014 and May 2015 the ratio of the MPs in the monitored period was 82 of the position to 10 of the opposition, it can be concluded that the numerous overpower of the majority MPs enabled them in most of the cases to act from the position of force, i.e. to adopt decisions by outvoting. That means that the majority did not actually need to enter into discussion about the legislation because it had the necessary majority which provided independent decision-making. On the other hand, there was a tendency in the discussions of the opposition MPs in such environment to bring elements of disrespect towards the personality, the political affiliation and arguments of the other speakers most likely to attract the attention on their arguments. Such behaviour may be interpreted as a manifestation of powerlessness in imposing their positions. This refers to part of the opposition MPs in cases of its manifestation and additionally prevented possible development of a deliberative discussion where their arguments would be taken into consideration, and the final decisions would be more acceptable for the citizens.

As an extreme situation which illustrates this relation in the Assembly can be the discussion for rebalancing the budget for 2014 which took place on 25th and 26th August 2014⁹ in the Financing and Budget Committee. The governing majority in the committee ignored the amendments submitted by

⁹Second report on the monitoring the debate quality in the Assembly, August-September 2014
http://idscs.org.mk/images/parliament-watchdog/VTOR_IZVESTAJ_SOBRANIE_avgust-septemvriMK.pdf



the opposition MPs and rejected them in most of the cases without any explanation and argumentation. As a response to that, the opposition MPs gradually escalated the discussions with more frequent attacks on personal and political basis and in several cases with using inappropriate and insulting speech towards the governing MPs. The committee session on 26th August culminated with a physical incident between the DUI MPs which were part of the majority and the opposition DPA. After the incident, the opposition MPs decided to boycott the further work of the Assembly. The governing majority in the committee in the rest of the session used the absence and instantly without any discussion and argumentation rejected all submitted amendments of the opposition and adopted the Budget rebalance.

Inappropriate speech, interruptions and limitations

With respect to the inappropriate speech which refers to use of inappropriate vocabulary by the speakers in the Assembly including swearing, pejorative and insulting words throughout the monitoring were noticed only in several cases. Most of these cases were on the mentioned session of the Financing and Budget Committee. Such speech was noticed in totally 1% of all monitored discussion in the period June 2014-May 2015.

No case of hate speech, i.e. discussion where the speaker insults, derogates, degrades the opponents based on their political, ethnic, religious or gender affiliation was identified in the Assembly in this period.

The number of short interruptions in the speeches of the MPs was also exceptionally low in this period, i.e. did not consist even 1% of the total discussions. More precisely, it concerned 17 interruptions in the discussions of the speakers which were partly because of remarks and interjections of other MPs and partly because of unintentional interruptions, such as phone ringing, equipment failure or inattention of other MPs. All interruptions were with duration of less than 10 seconds and in all of them, the speaker resumed their discussion.

When it comes to physical limitations of the MPs right to state their attitudes and position, it was identified in total of 5 cases throughout the entire monitored period. Thereby the MPs pointed in all cases that they was prevented to state their arguments without interruptions. The obstacles pointed to by the MPs were removed and they continued their discussions in all cases.

Part 2

How do the media inform of the parliamentary discussions?

Parallel with observation of the quality of the MPs discussions, the observers monitored how the media reported on the work of the Assembly. From the aspect of the deliberative theory, the media have an exceptionally important role in the decision-making process. Their position of informers and interpreters of the information on events puts them in a position of mediators between the MPs and the wide public whereas the media have the responsibility and possibility to select the information that would be presented to the viewers, listeners and readers. The quality of the media coverage for the parliament work is significant because the degree of knowledge of the wider public or parts of it which could be concerned by the topics discussed by the MPs and the decisions made in the parliament may depend thereupon. Well-informed public which has knowledge of the topics discussed



in the parliament and the key arguments and positions of the MPs may be constructively included in the discussion. The concerned groups or parts of the public may be included in the discussion by proposing their arguments, suggestions and ideas, thereby possibly strengthening, amending or rejecting arguments of the MPs in the direction of preparing decisions for the benefit of the common good of all citizens. The decisions including such elements are more accepted and long-termed in the society.

Methodology of monitoring the media reporting

The methodology of the monitored media included several basic elements. Texts and stories published in the media mentioning the Assembly were the aim of the analysis. The observers monitored total of 10 media, 6 of which were daily newspapers and 4 were national TV stations. 4 of them were published in Macedonian and 2 in Albanian language and 2 of the TV stations were in Macedonian and 2 in Albanian.

The following media were part of the monitoring:

The newspapers: - Dnevnik, Utrinski vesnik, Vecer, Sloboden pecat, Koha, Lajm.

TV stations: - Sitel, Telma, Alsat-M and MRT2.

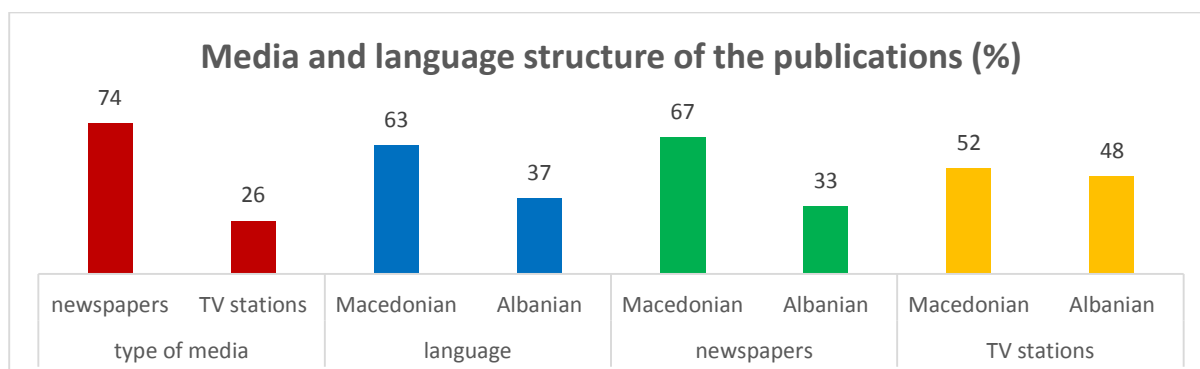
The observers identified the following elements in the texts of the newspapers and the TV stories:

1. The genre the published information,
2. In which section the information is published,
3. If the information is published on the front page of the newspapers or in the general announcement of the TV news,
4. The information focus – what the essence of the information mentioning the Assembly refers to,
5. Number of sources – how many sources were stated in the published information,
6. What are the sources of the published information referring to the Assembly,
7. Position of the MPs as sources – which political option the MPs that are stated as sources of the published information belong to,
8. If the MPs sources are stated by name and surname or are anonymous,
9. If the information has an author.

Findings of the media observation

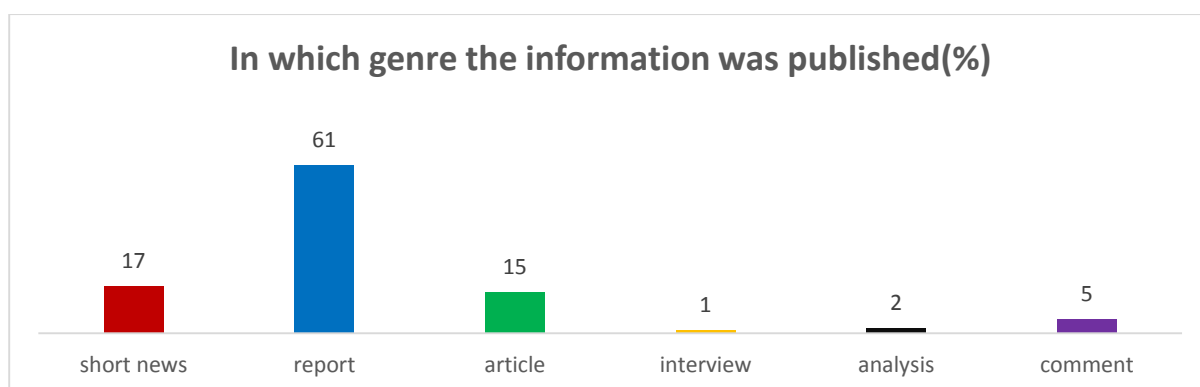
The analysis of the media reporting on the Assembly encompasses the information published in ten media in the period between June 2012 and May 2015. In that period 1141 information mentioning the Assembly were identified in the monitored daily newspapers and central news on the TV stations.

- According to the type of the media publishing the information, 74% were newspaper articles and 26% were TV stories.
- According to the language of the medium that published them, 63% were in Macedonian, 37% in Albanian.
- 67% of the articles published in the newspapers were in Macedonian, 33% in Albanian.
- 52% of the stories published on the TV stations were in Macedonian, 48% in Albanian.



Information genre

The analysis of the media reporting indicates that when the media reported on events related to the Assembly most often they published the information as a journalist reports and short news where they only informed of the events. In this period, 61% of the information mentioning the Assembly was published as reports. In 17% of the cases, the information was published as short news stating only the basic information of the event. When informing of the parliament, the media much rarely used analytical genres such as articles and analyses. In the monitored period, total of 15% of the published information was assessed as articles wherein informative as well as analytical elements were identified. Only 2% of the published information was structured as analyses referring to the work of the parliament.



Focus of the information

The observers analyzed the published information mentioning the Assembly whether the focus of informing, i.e. the content of the published texts and stories refer to the work of the MPs and the happenings on the sessions or whether the parliament was mentioned in another context. The monitoring data showed that in this period the media mostly put the parliament in a context of the wider political situation in the country, the political crisis and the relations between the two biggest political parties in the country. On the second place according to the frequency was the information generally referring to the work of the Assembly whereas again most of the focus was on the relations between the political forces in the legislative house. The information referring to the boycott of the opposition MPs was also included here.

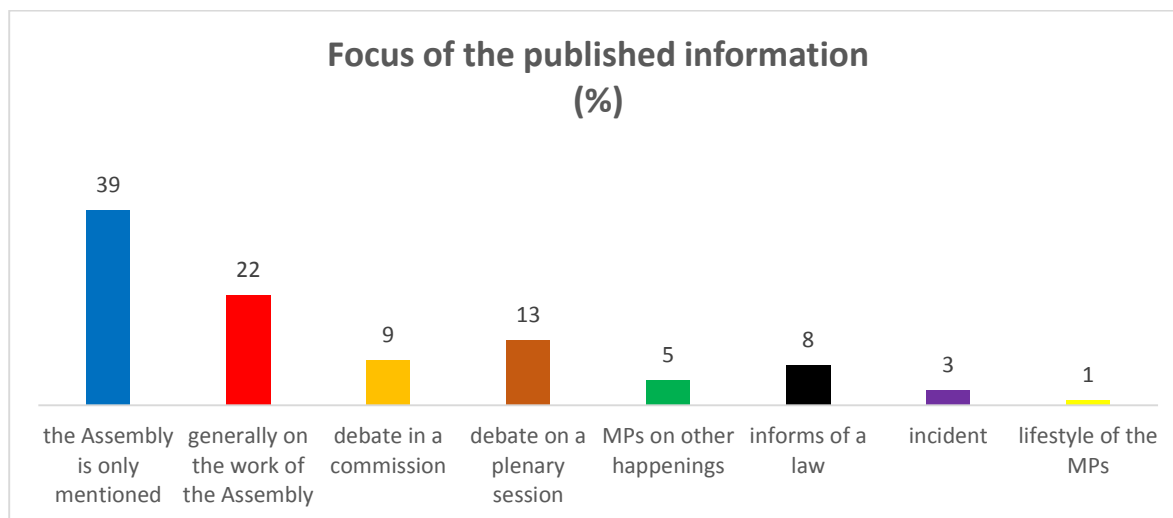


A small portion of the published information referred to the debates on the plenary sessions and the sessions of the committees and to broadcasting the essence of the arguments stated by the MPs about the topics discussed.

Hence in the period from June 2014 to May 2015, 39% of the published information in media only mentioned the Assembly, but the content of the information did not refer thereto at all. In 22% of the information, the focus was generally on the work of the Assembly, without going into detail about the particular happenings on the sessions. The parliamentary debates were the focus of 22% of the published information, 13% of which referred to plenary session discussion, 9% to parliamentary committee sessions.

8% of the published information informed of new laws, legal modifications entering into force, or terminating the validity of other regulations voted in the Assembly. In 5% of the information, the Assembly was mentioned because the MPs were source of the information, but the essence of the information did not refer to their work, but to other current topics.

In 3% of the published information the media mentioned the Assembly in the context of the incidents that had happened therein. Thereby such information mostly referred to the physical incident that occurred in August 2014 in the Financing and Budget Committee.

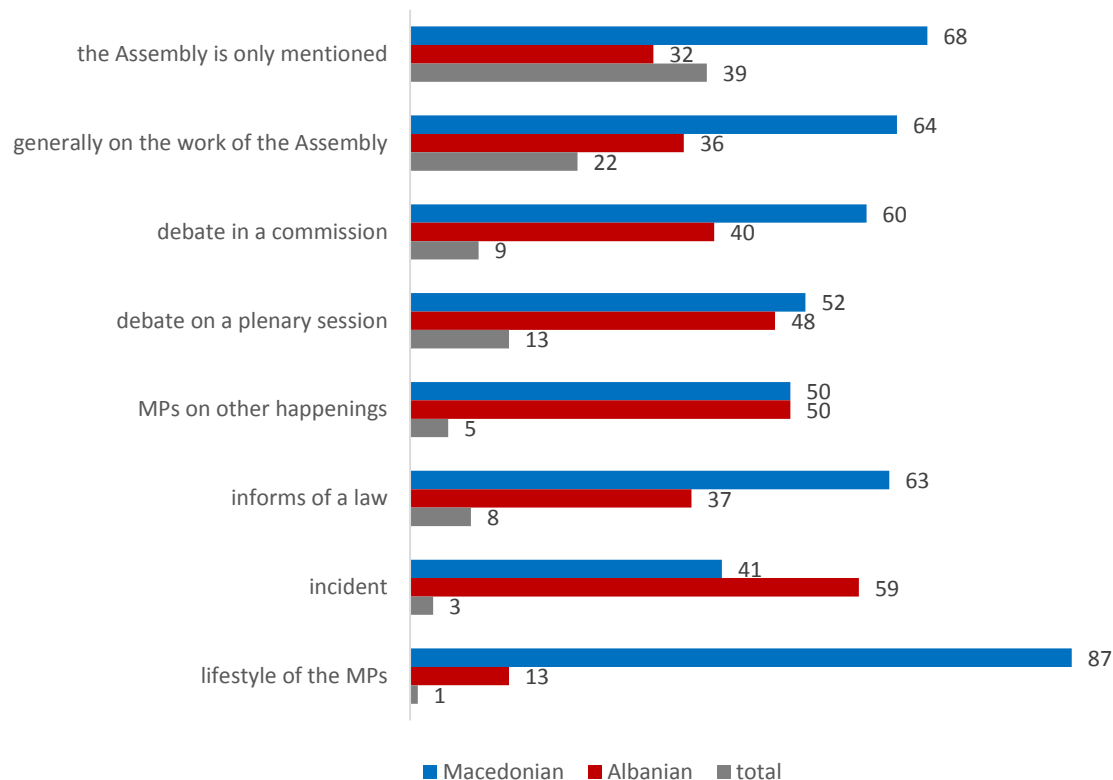


If the focus of the media information is reviewed according to the language of the media publishing the information, it can be concluded that the media in Macedonian published twice more information mentioning the Assembly only in the context of the wider political condition. Also the media in Macedonian published more information regarding the work of the Assembly in general.

Out of the total number of information about the plenary session debates, 52% were published in media on Macedonian while 48% in media on Albanian. Regarding the information on the committee debates, 60% were published in media on Macedonian while 40% in media on Albanian. The media in Macedonian language published twice more information on the modifications to laws and other regulations, and the media in Albanian informed more on the physical incident in the Financing and Budget Committee.

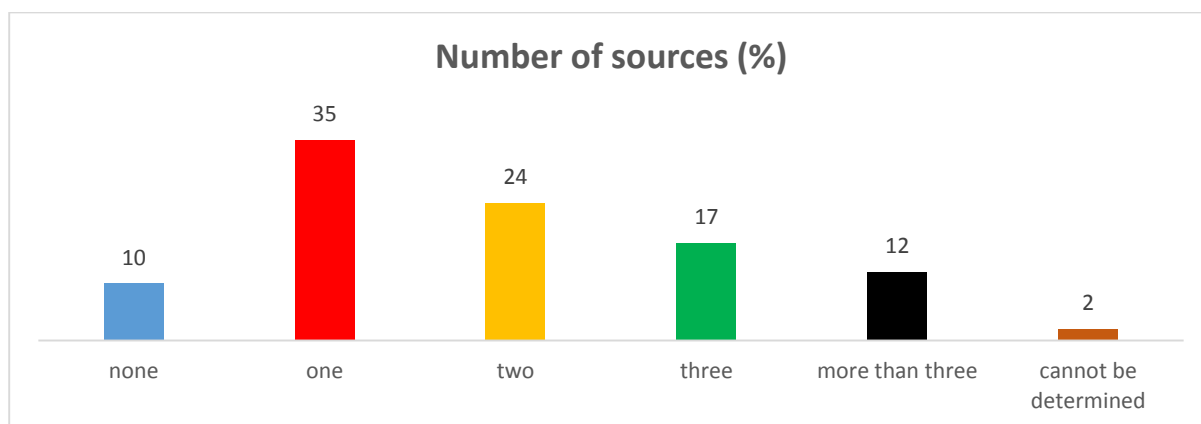


Focus of the publications according to the language of the medium (%)



Sources of information mentioning the Assembly

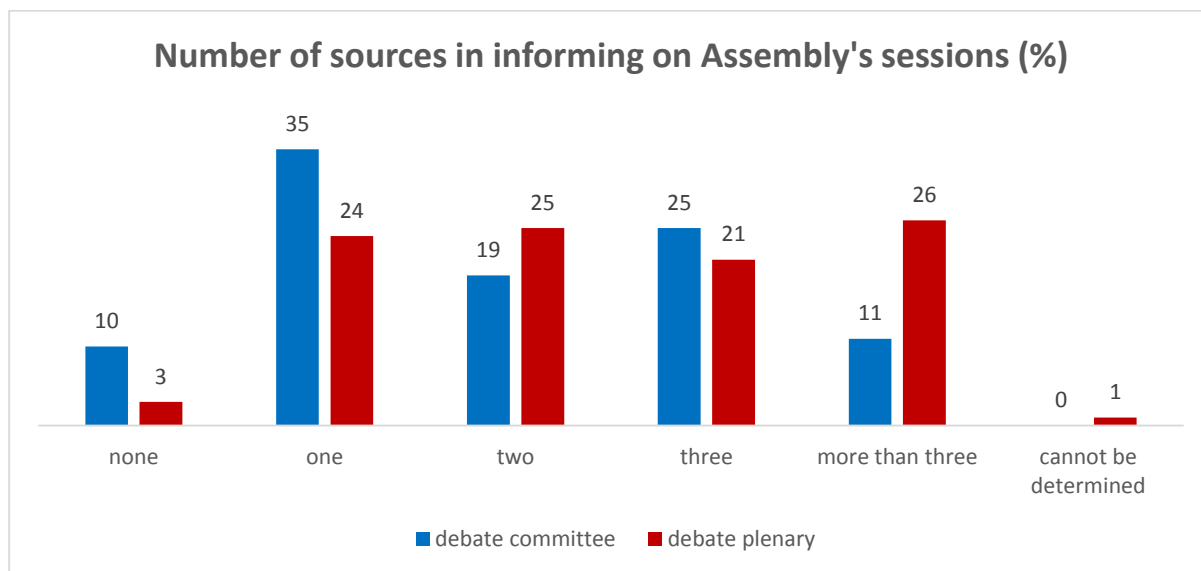
The observers identified the number of stated sources in the information mentioning the Assembly. Thereby, sources were considered to be persons, groups, political parties and state and other institutions which were stated as sources of information by the author of the texts and stories. In 35% of the published information only one source was identified. Two sources were identified in 24%, three in 17% and more than three in 12% of the published information. In 10% of the information mentioning the Assembly not a single source was stated.



The media reporting on the discussions of the parliamentary sessions in the monitored period frequently used more sources for the information when they reported on the debates of the plenary sessions rather than of the committees.

In 10% of the cases not a single source was stated, in 35% there was only one source of the published information referring to the committee sessions. In 19% two sources were stated, in 25% three, and in 11% more than three sources.

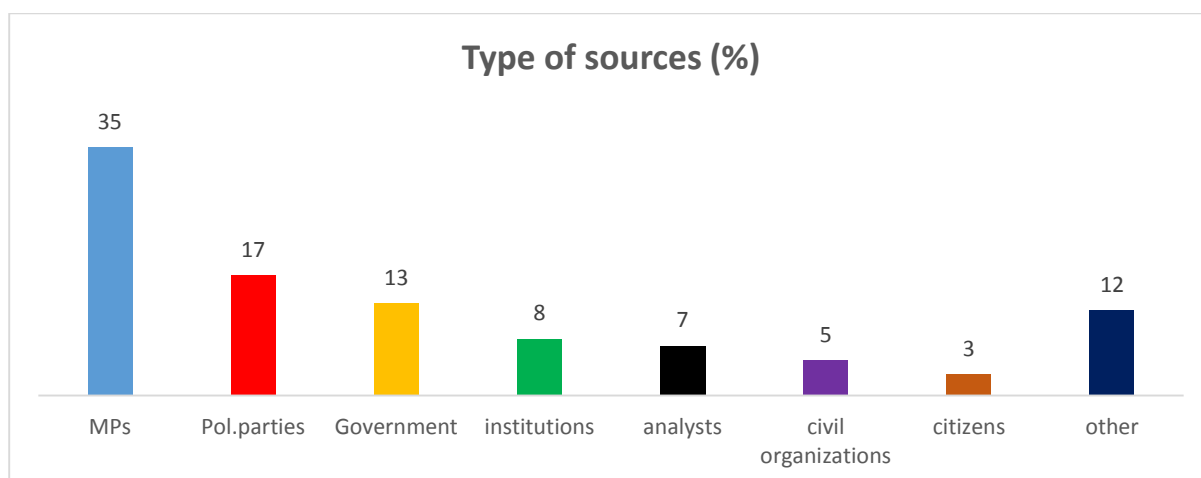
More sources were consulted when the information referred to the plenary sessions of the Assembly. In 3% of the cases no source was given in the information. There was one source in 24%, two in 25%, three in 21% and more than three sources in 26% of the information with such focus.



The MPs are the most frequent sources in the media information mentioning the Assembly. In the observation of the media reporting the MPs are identified as sources as well as the elected MPs of the opposition coalition led by SDSM which throughout the monitoring period boycotted the parliament, i.e. were not included in the work thereof.

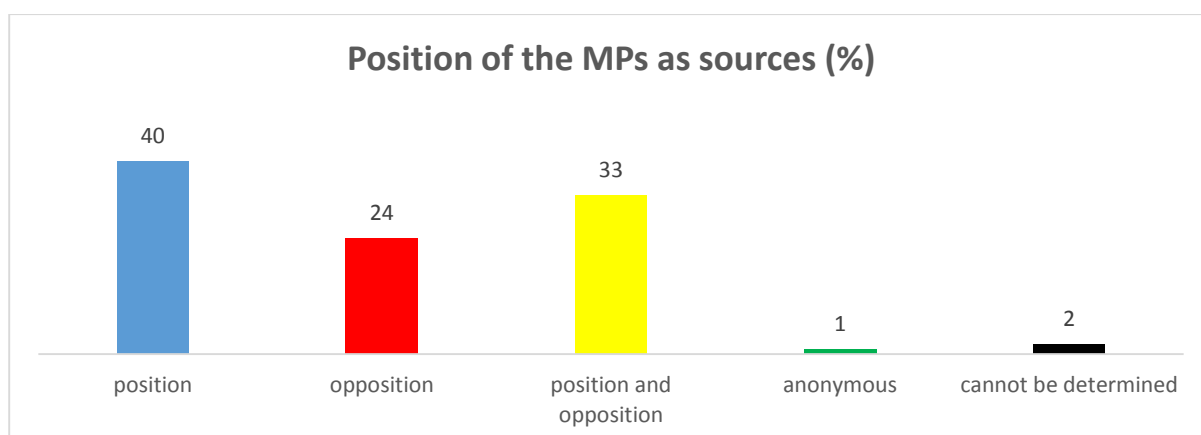


The MPs as sources appeared in 35% of the cases of the published information. Second, according to the representation were the political party members with 17% and were followed by the governmental ministries and deputies with 13%. 8% of the stated sources belonged to the representatives of state and public institutions. The analysts were presented in 7% of the cases, the civil organizations and NGOs were in 5%, while the citizens in 3%. "Other" sources, such as foreign diplomats and statesmen, representatives of the parliament of other state and foreign experts present 12% of the stated sources.



In cases when the MPs were stated as sources, the media more often published information where only the representatives of one political options in the Assembly were stated rather than information stating sources from both the government and opposition. Thereby, the MPs of the governing majority rather than the opposition were more often stated as sources in such cases.

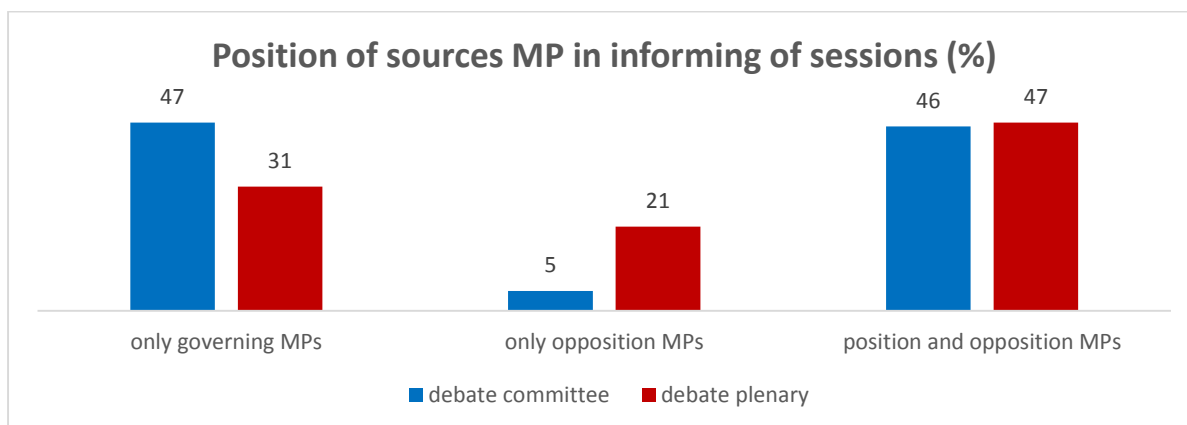
Only governing MPs were represented in 40% of the information wherein the MPs are sources. The opposition MPs were stated in only 24% of such information. At the same time, the position and opposition MPs were stated as sources in 33% of the information.



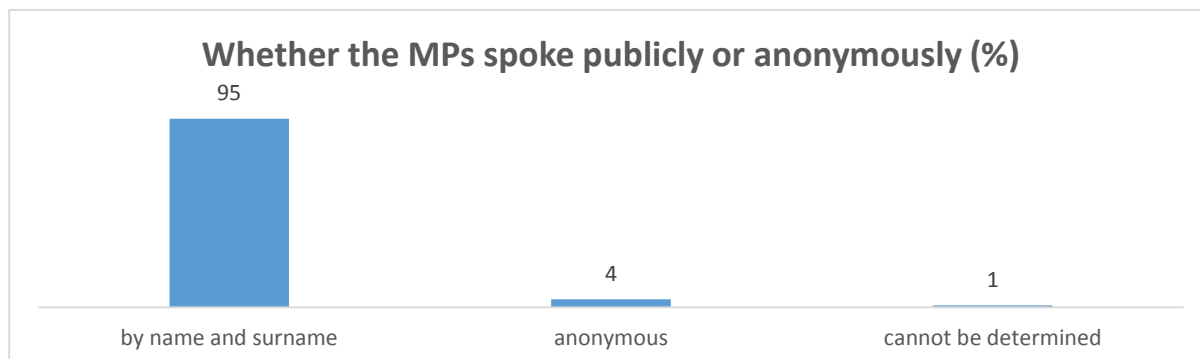
In reporting on the Assembly's sessions, the representation of the position and opposition MPs was different depending whether the information referred to a plenary session or parliamentary committee session. In 31% of the information referring to the plenary sessions only sources of the



governing majority were stated. In 21% only opposition sources were stated, in 47% both position and opposition MPs were stated. There is a bigger difference in the representation of the MPs as sources depending on their affiliation with a political option on the committee sessions. In 47% of the cases only governing MPs were represented and only opposition MPs were represented in 5%. In 46% of the cases, at the same time position and opposition sources were represented in the information.



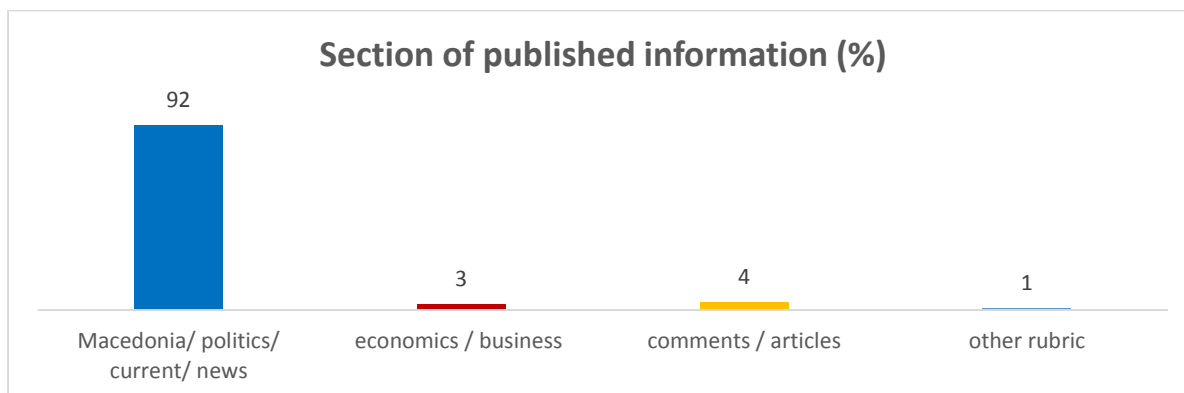
In most of the information where MPs in the Assembly were stated as sources, they were stated by name and surname. The MPs remained anonymous in only 4% of the sources.



According to the monitoring data, in the period between June 2014 and May 2015, 40% of the cases where the information mentioning the Assembly was published on the front pages of the newspapers or in the general announcement of the TV news, 60% did not get such place. With regards to the rubrics, such information most frequently, i.e. in 92% of the cases, was published on the front pages of the newspapers and in the first pages of the newspapers as "Makedonija", "Politika", "Aktuelno" and other. The information mentioning the Assembly much rarely, only in 4% of the cases, was published in the rubrics as "Komentari"(Comments) and "Kolumni"(Articles). 3% of such information was published in the rubrics for economics, finances and business.



Section of published information (%)



Conclusions

- In the 10-month period of monitoring sessions, only one MP indicated that he changed his position due to better arguments given by another MP in the discussion. It indicates that the MPs in the Assembly acted with strong and ahead prepared positions without being prepared to possible change their position.
- The women in the Assembly were responsible for deepening the discussion about several topics on the agenda although they constituted one third of the overall composition of the Assembly in the monitored period. 51% of all discourses belonged thereto. Separately, according to the discussion type, 16% of the speeches belonged to the women MPs, 50% of the replicas and even 72% of the contra replicas.
- The ratio of the speeches-72% with the replicas-14% indicated that a large part of the stated arguments in the speeches were not disputed at all by the other speakers for overly argued discussion in order to test their validity and justification.
- In 56% of the total discussion, the MPs explained their positions by at least two arguments. In 27% with one argument, in 12% the explanation was weak, and in 5% of the cases there was no explanation.
- The speeches prevailed with the governing majority MPs, while the contra replicas prevailed with the opposition MPs.
- In 67% of the cases, the speakers did not refer at all to the arguments stated by the other speakers on the sessions.
- The MPs often claimed that their arguments supported the common good. They were more rarely related to abstract principles, their own ethnic, political, social group or to other groups.
- Most of the cases (90%) where the speakers did not pay any attention to the value of the other arguments belonged to the majority MPs. Most of the speeches where the MPs did not acknowledge the value of the other arguments belonged to the opposition.
- The numerous dominance of the majority MPs enabled them in most of the cases to act from the position of power, i.e. adopt the decisions by outvoting. That means that the majority did not need to start a well-argued discussion about the topics on the agenda because it had the necessary majority which enabled independent decision-making.
- There was a tendency of the opposition MPs in the discussions to include elements of disrespect towards the personality, the political affiliation and the arguments of the other



participants mostly in an attempt to attract the attention to their arguments. Such behaviour may be interpreted as a manifestation of powerlessness in imposing their positions.

- The MPs from Electoral Unit 4 were most active on the monitored sessions, followed by the MPs from Electoral Unit 1 and Electoral Unit 5.
- The media most often mentioned the Assembly in a context of wider political events in the society and the political crisis, but they rarely informed of the topics discussed by the MPs, the contents of the discussion, i.e. the arguments stated by the MPs on those sessions.
- The MPs were the most frequent sources in the information mentioning the Assembly. Thereby the information whose sources were the MPs of only one political option in the parliament was mostly published, and less of both the position and opposition at the same time. In most of the cases the governing MPs were presented as sources in the information with one political option, whereas the opposition MPs were presented in a smaller part thereof.
- The information on the Assembly was mostly published in the form of reports and short news wherein only informative elements for some event prevailed. The media very rarely publish information with more analytical approach in the form of articles and analysis.

All publications of the project “The Assembly under scrutiny, strengthening of the political debate and the deliberative discourse”

First report on monitoring the debate quality in the Assembly, 19 June – 1 August 2014.
http://idscs.org.mk/images/parliament-watchdog/izvestaj%20za%20sobranie_juni-juli_11.09.2014.pdf

Second report on monitoring the debate quality in the Assembly, 25 August – 30 September 2014.
http://idscs.org.mk/images/parliament-watchdog/VTOR_IZVESTAJ_SOBRANIE_avgust-septemvriMK.pdf

Third report on monitoring the debate quality in the Assembly, October 2014.
http://idscs.org.mk/images/parliament-watchdog/TRET_IZVESTAJ_SOBRANIE_OKTOMVRI_MK.pdf

Forth report on monitoring the debate quality in the Assembly, November 2014.
http://idscs.org.mk/images/parliament-watchdog/CETVRT_IZVESTAJ_SOBRANIE_MONITORING_NOEMVRI.pdf

Fifth report on monitoring the debate quality in the Assembly, December 2014.
<http://idscs.org.mk/images/parliament-watchdog/0802-Petti-izvestaj-od-monitoring-na-Sobranie-mk.pdf>

Sixth report on monitoring the debate quality in the Assembly, January 2015.
<http://idscs.org.mk/images/parliament-watchdog/0802-Sesti-izvestaj-od-monitoring-na-Sobranie-mk.pdf>



Seventh report on monitoring the debate quality in the Assembly, February 2015. <http://idscs.org.mk/images/parliament-watchdog/0802-Sedmi-izvestaj-od-monitoring-na-Sobranie-mk.pdf>

Eighth report on monitoring the debate quality in the Assembly, March 2015. <http://idscs.org.mk/images/parliament-watchdog/Osmi-izvestaj-od-monitoring-na-Sobranie-mk.pdf>

Ninth report on monitoring the debate quality in the Assembly, April 2015. <http://idscs.org.mk/images/parliament-watchdog/Deveti-izvestaj-od-monitoring-na-Sobranie-mk.pdf>

Tenth report on monitoring the debate quality in the Assembly, May 2015. <http://idscs.org.mk/images/parliament-watchdog/Desetti-izvestaj-za-sobranie-mk.pdf>

Report on monitoring the parliamentary discussion on modifications to the Law on Higher Education, September 2015. <http://idscs.org.mk/images/parliament-watchdog/0802-Izvestaj-od-monitoring-na-debata-za-visoko-obrazovanie-Sobranie-mk.pdf>

First report on monitoring the quality of media reporting, June – September 2014. <http://idscs.org.mk/images/parliament-watchdog/prv-izvestaj-za-mediumi-juni-septemvri.pdf>

Second report on monitoring the quality of media reporting, October 2014. <http://idscs.org.mk/images/parliament-watchdog/SOBRANIETO POD LUPA VTOR IZVESTAJ MEDIUMI Oktomvri MK.pdf>

Third report on monitoring the quality of media reporting, November 2014. http://idscs.org.mk/images/parliament-watchdog/Tret-izveshtaj-od-monitoringot-na-mediumite_mk.pdf

Fourth report on monitoring the quality of media reporting, December 2014. <http://idscs.org.mk/images/parliament-watchdog/0802-Cetvrt-izveshtaj-od-monitoring-na-mediumi-mk.pdf>

Fifth report on monitoring the quality of media reporting, January 2015. <http://idscs.org.mk/images/parliament-watchdog/Petti-izveshtaj-od-monitoring-na-mediumi-mk.pdf>

Sixth report on monitoring the quality of media reporting, February 2015. <http://idscs.org.mk/images/parliament-watchdog/0802-sesti-izveshtaj-od-monitoring-na-mediumi-mk.pdf>

Seventh report on monitoring the quality of media reporting, March 2015. <http://idscs.org.mk/images/parliament-watchdog/Sedmi-izveshtaj-od-monitoring-na-mediumi-mk.pdf>

Eighth report on monitoring the quality of media reporting, April 2015. <http://idscs.org.mk/images/parliament-watchdog/Osmi-izveshtaj-od-monitoring-na-mediumi-mk.pdf>



Ninth report on monitoring the quality of media reporting, May 2015.

<http://idscs.org.mk/images/parliament-watchdog/Devetti-izveshtaj-od-monitoring-na-mediumi-.pdf>

Report on the first field survey of the public opinion on the work of the Assembly, May - June 2014.

http://idscs.org.mk/images/anketi/anketa_za_rabotata_na_sobraniето_16072014.pdf

Report on the second field survey of the public opinion on the work of the Assembly, May - June

2015. [http://idscs.org.mk/images/parliament-watchdog/Sobraniето_pod_lupa-](http://idscs.org.mk/images/parliament-watchdog/Sobraniето_pod_lupa-Vtora_terenska_anketa_za_rabotata_na_Sobraniето.pdf)

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Popovikj M. (2015) How was the 2015 Budget adopted? View on the debate in the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia. Public policies briefing. Institute for Democracy Societas Civilis Skopje.

Bliznakovski J. (2015) In search of effective discussion: key limitations to the right to speech from parliamentary rostrum. Public policies briefing. Institute for Democracy Societas Civilis Skopje.

Mangova I. (2015) Increase of the public participation in the Macedonian Assembly. Public policies briefing. Institute for Democracy Societas Civilis Skopje.

The project "The Assembly under scrutiny, strengthening of the political debate and the deliberative discourse"

The project "The Assembly under scrutiny, strengthening of the political debate and the deliberative discourse" is financed by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and co-financed by the Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" Skopje and the Institute for Central-Eastern and Balkan Europe.

The project commenced in February 2014 and lasted until October 2015. The part of the activities included ten-month monitoring of the assembly debate quality and ten-month monitoring of how the media reported on the work of the Assembly. The monitoring of the assembly debate and the media reporting took place in the period between June 2014 and May 2015 whereas after each passed month the public was informed of the basic research findings by monthly reports. Thereby, totally 20 monthly reports were prepared during the project, 11 of which referred to the parliamentary debate, 9 to the media reporting. In the same period, the results of two field research of the citizens' perceptions on the work of the MPs and the Assembly were conducted and published. The findings obtained from the monitoring and the field surveys were presented on all three trainings for an argument-based debate to the members of the youth branches of all relevant political parties in the country.

The end findings from monitoring the debate and media reporting were presented and debated on six round tables, i.e. one in each of the six electoral units in the state before current and former MPs, journalists and representatives of the civil organizations.

Three case studies were prepared in the project handling three topics from the work of the Assembly which during the project were identified as indicative for the quality of the debate and the work of the Assembly. The case studies referred to the possibility for participation of the public in the work of



the parliament, the role of the debate in adopting the Budget and whether the modifications to the Rulebook, in the part of the discussion duration, influenced the quality and the possibility for developing the debate and the decision-making based on arguments.

After finishing the monitoring, all findings thereof were processed and included in this final Analysis of the discourse quality in the Assembly and of the media reporting, which was presented in front of the public on a press conference and disseminated to all MPs in the Assembly, the political parties, the media and the relevant civil organizations.

This publication is prepared with the help of the European Union. The content of the publication is a sole responsibility of the Institute for democracy Societas Civilis – Skopje (IDSCS) and in no way expresses the views of the European Union.