
REPORT FROM THE MONITORING OF THE DEBATE QUALITY IN THE PARLIAMENT – CONSTITUTIVE SESSION –

– (27 MARCH-27 APRIL 2017)–

The Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" - Skopje (IDSCS), as of July, 2014, monitors the debate quality in Parliament and the media coverage on the work of Parliament. The first cycle of monitoring took place during a 10 month period, i.e. from June, 2014 to May, 2015. As of September 2015 the monitoring and assessment of the quality of the parliamentary debate and of the media reporting continues, supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and shall last until December 2017. The monitoring in this period is focused on discussions which regard topics of the parliamentary agenda which are in the area of rule of law, human rights and democracy. In this sense, the parliamentary work groups and plenary sessions in which area are the above mentioned fields are also being monitored. Additionally, the project encompasses the media, i.e. the media is followed on the way they report on the work of Parliament. During monitoring, the findings on the quality of debate in Parliament and on media coverage are published in quarterly reports. In the period following the dissolution of the Assembly, IDSCS focused on preparing reports on specific debates such as: Analysis of the parliamentary debate on the floods: "The Party Stronger Than the Storm"¹.

In front of you is the report on the quality of the debate in Parliament, which refers to the **constitutive session** of the new parliamentary composition, in the period from January 30 to April 27, i.e. the day of the violent attack on the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia.

Summary

Opposition MPs were more active during the constitutive session. Opposition MPs participated with 81% of the discussions, while majority MPs participated with 19% of the discussions. The most active MP who appeared several times to take the floor is Ilija Dimovski, who took the floor 132 times during the discussion.

¹ Jane Dimeski, "Analysis of the parliamentary debate on the floods: The Party Stronger Than the Storm"(December 09, 2016), <http://idscs.org.mk/mk/portfolio/анализа-на-собраниската-дебата-за-поп/>

According to the type of discussions during the constitutive session, the ratio is almost equal. 34% of the discussions were replies, 33% counter-replies, while 32% of the discussions were speeches.

Referring to the type of discussion **according to the political affiliation** of the speakers, although there is a balance between the government and the opposition in the speeches, the opposition dominates with replies (92%) and counter-replies (100%).

In 29% of the discussion the MPs had no arguments. Half of the discussion is characterized by weak argumentation (50%), while in 20% of the discussion MPs used only one argument to explain their position.

The degree of argumentation **according to political affiliation** shows that the ruling MPs used multiple arguments in their speeches, they used at least 1 argument in 46% of their discussion, while opposition MPs in only 15%.

Regarding how the MPs respond to the arguments put forward by other speakers, it can be concluded that they mostly only partially address, partly distort or ignore the arguments (48%). What's most striking is that the arguments were appropriately addressed in only 6% of the discussion.

Analyzed **according to the political affiliation** of the speakers, we can conclude that the opposition MPs partially addressed, partly distorted or ignored the arguments of others in 50% of their statements, and also in 14% of the discussion, although they did not ignore the arguments they were distorted. Compared to the opposition, the government completely ignored the arguments of other speakers in only 2% of their discussion, while the opposition MPs did so in 8% of their speeches.

The MPs continue with the immutability of attitudes and positions due to better interlocutors' arguments. In 32% of the discussion, there was no reference to whether the MPs changed their position, and in 47% of the discussion there was no change in attitudes, because the MPs had the same position, and they recognized the value of the arguments. In 20% of the discussion, the MPs did not change their position, and did not recognize the arguments, and in only 1%, although the MPs had a different position and did not change their position, they accepted the value of the arguments of the other speaker.

The opposition MPs in 56% of their discussion did not have a change of attitude, they held the same position, and acknowledged the value of arguments, while in 15% of their discussion the opposition MPs did not change their position and did not admit the arguments. 40% of the **discussion of the government** is characterized by no change of attitude and no recognition of arguments, while 48% is characterized by no reference. MPs again, as shown by previous IDSCS reports on the quality of the debate in Parliament, firmly stand in their positions, without the will for a constructive debate, and changing the position for a better argument.

The most worrying thing is that MPs **most often direct their attitude towards the personality of other MPs rather than to arguments**. This shows that the discussion takes place at the level of comments on someone's person, rather than on a good consideration of the arguments of the other. In 73% of the discussion, they expressed no sign of respect or disrespect for the arguments of the other

speakers, while in 24% of the discussion they expressed partial respect. This is mostly due to the fact that the bulk of the discussion, as we pointed out previously, was between MPs from the same political party (coalition). The MPs were more explicit when it came to dealing with the personality of MPs from the other political option. Speakers in most of the discussions expressed some kind of attitude towards the personality of the other MPs. Thus, respect is expressed in only 2% of cases, and partial respect in as much as 54% of cases. That means that the MPs in many of the discussions did not resist imposing mocking or milder insulting expressions and attacks on the personality of their counterparts from the opposing political options.

What is important to note is that in only 2% of their speeches, both MPs from the government and the opposition have expressed respect for the personality of their colleagues from another political party.

It is also important to note that women participated with only 28% of the discussions, while men accounted for 72%.

Political context

According to the Constitution, the Parliament has the legislative power and currently consists of 120 MPs. MPs are elected in direct elections, through proportional electoral lists for a term of four years. In the last parliamentary elections held on December 11, 2016, the party Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization - Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) and its coalition won 51 MPs, the SDSM coalition with the smaller parties - won 49 MPs, while the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), won 10 MPs. The BESA movement won 5 MPs, the Alliance for Albanians won 3 MPs, while the Democratic Party of Albanians won 2 MPs.

On December 30, 2016, 19 days after the early parliamentary elections, the first session of Parliament was held to verify the mandates of the new parliamentary composition, the same session was the last one for 2016.

The mandate for forming the Government was first given to the leader of VMRO-DPMNE, Nikola Gruevski, since the VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition had a majority in the Parliament, but due to the inability to reach an agreement with the Democratic Union for Integration, the long-standing coalition partner, the mandate was returned to President Ivanov. The president then refused to hand over the mandate to SDSM leader Zoran Zaev, asking him to confirm that he had a majority in forming a government by collecting signatures from the MPs. Ivanov also urged guarantees that the new mandatee will preserve the national interests of the country and will make a systemic reform of the national security system. Meanwhile, the BESA movement, Alliance for Albanians and DUI parties came out with the so-called Platform of Albanians, an act that further polarized the situation in society on an ethnic basis. The parties explained that the declaration was made in order to give support to the Albanian parties in the process of negotiations for the formation of a new government.

The new negotiations on forming the government were mainly conducted between SDSM and DUI, while in the public the most thorny topics were three of the demands in the so-called Platform of the

Albanians: "use of the Albanian language at all levels of government and a guarantee of its application as a fundamental and constitutional right"; "comprehensive debate on the flag, national anthem and state coat of arms of the Republic of Macedonia - in order for state symbols to reflect the social multi-ethnicity and ethnic equality"; "The adoption of a Resolution in the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia condemning the genocide against the Albanian people in Macedonia in the period 1912-1956".

On February 24, DUI provided the necessary signatures, demanded by President Gjorgje Ivanov, which gave SDSM the conditions to get its mandate and form a government. VMRO-DPMNE, via a Facebook status of the leader of the party, Nikola Gruevski, on 26 February 2017, called on the "people" to stand up for the protection of the unitarity of the state which is under attack. These calls prompted the formation of a new movement called "For a Common Macedonia" that protested in front of the Government and Parliament for months, accusing SDSM leader Zoran Zaev of betraying and endangering the unitarity with the acceptance of the Albanian Platform, which was called the "Tirana Platform". On March 1, President Ivanov refused to give the mandate to SDSM leader Zoran Zaev on the grounds that despite the signatures, the other two conditions, the guarantee for preserving the national interests of the country and the systemic reform of the national security system were not met. This violates Article 90 of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia stating that the President of the Republic of Macedonia is obliged, within ten days of the constitution of Parliament, to entrust the mandate for the composition of the Government to a candidate of the party, that is, parties that have a majority in Parliament.

On 27 March 2017, the Parliament continued its constitutive plenary session with the following agenda:

1. Election of the President, Deputy Chairman, members and their deputies of the Commission on Electoral Issues
2. Election of the President of Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia.

At the session on April 27, 2017, despite the requests of the members of the majority, the session to be continued until the election of a new President of Parliament, it was interrupted by the chairman of the session, Trajko Veljanovski. MPs from the majority decided to go a step further and according to the rules of procedure (Article 78 paragraph 2)² switched to the last item on the agenda and elected DUI MP Talat Xhaferi as new President of Parliament. After this act, protesters from the movement "For a Common Macedonia" without greater resistance from the police entered the Parliament building, and some of them attacked the leader of SDSM and MPs from the majority. Several MPs and journalists were injured in the attack, and Alliance of the Albanians president Zijadin Sela suffered serious injuries. The new majority called it an attack in order to kill their MPs, and the opposition as

² Rules of Procedure of the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia, Article 78, paragraph 2:

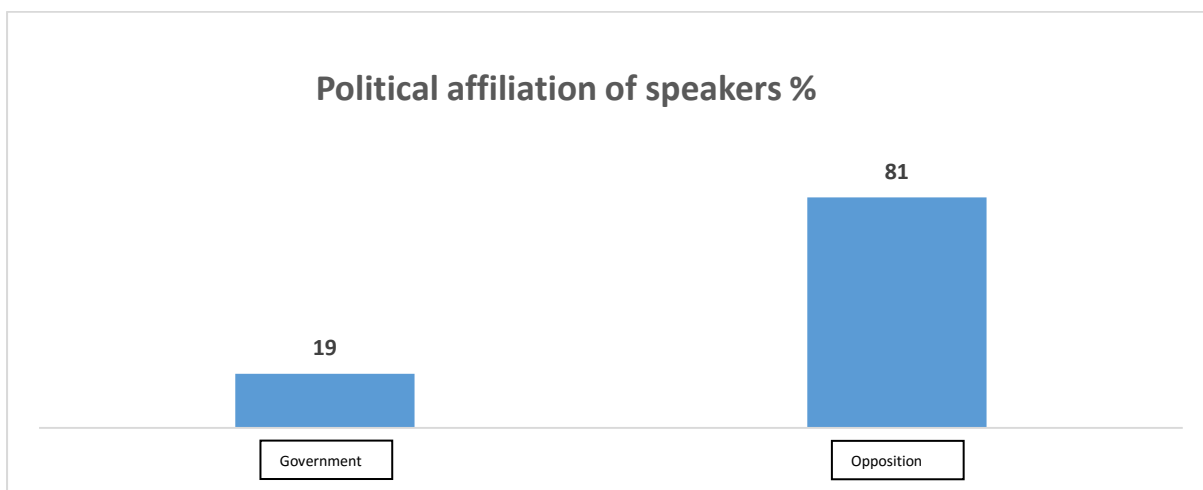
- (2) During the session, upon the proposal of the President of Parliament, the proposer or the MP who is supported by at least ten Members of Parliament, Parliament decides without any debate on any proposal for changes in the order of the debate on the items on the agenda, i.e. to conduct a single debate upon items on the agenda that are interconnected. The explanation for the proposal lasts for three minutes.

an established revolt of citizens from the violation of the Constitution and laws by the election of the new President. Video footage showing how several opposition MPs allowed the protesters to enter the Parliament building appeared in the public. The constitutive session lasted more than a month, there were 21 continuations and concluded on May 31, 2017.

Findings of the monitoring

Type of discussions

According to the political affiliation of the speakers from the monitoring of the constitutive session, the opposition MPs, consisting of VMRO-DPMNE and DPA, were more active with 81% of the discussions, while MPs from the majority comprised of SDSM, DUI, Movement BESA³ and Alliance for Albanians participated in 19% of the discussions.⁴



The most active MPs who called several times to take the floor are Ilija Dimovski, who during the discussion took the floor 132 times, followed by the MP Krsto Mukoski, who took the floor 91 times, and the third most active in a row is Zoran Ilioski, also a member from the ranks of VMRO-DPMNE.

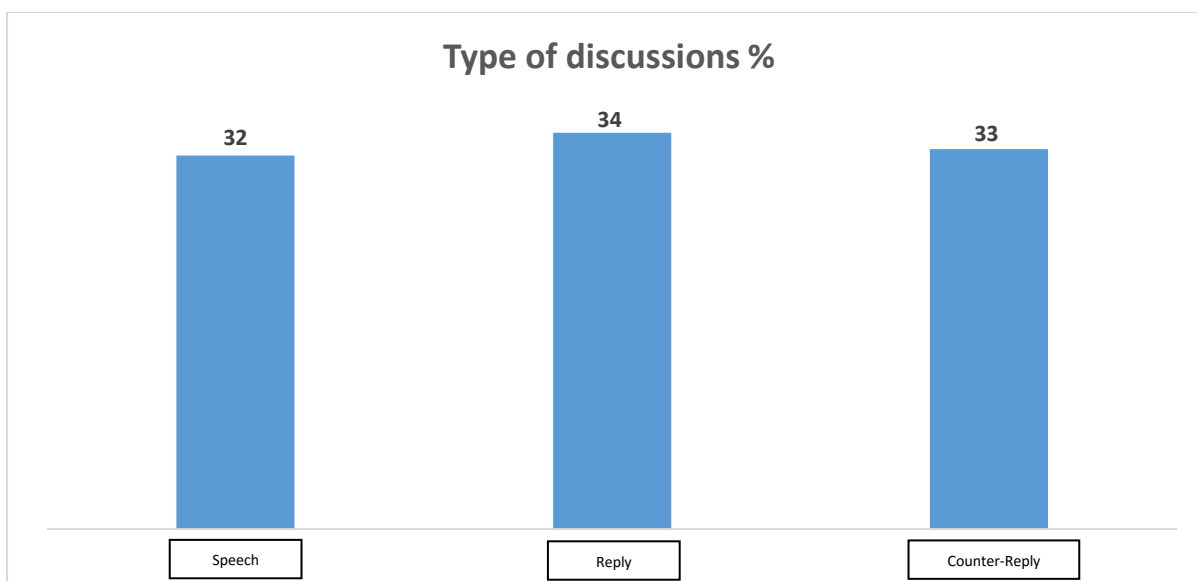
Name	Number of presentations
Ilija Dimovski	132
Krsto Mukoski	91
Zoran Ilioski	77
Dimitar Stevanandzija	72
Antonio Milososki	70
Goran Manojloski	64

³ The BESA movement during the monitoring of the constitutive session of Parliament was treated as part of the majority, due to the submitted signatures for the support of Zoran Zaev, the leader of SDSM as the mandatee of the future Government.

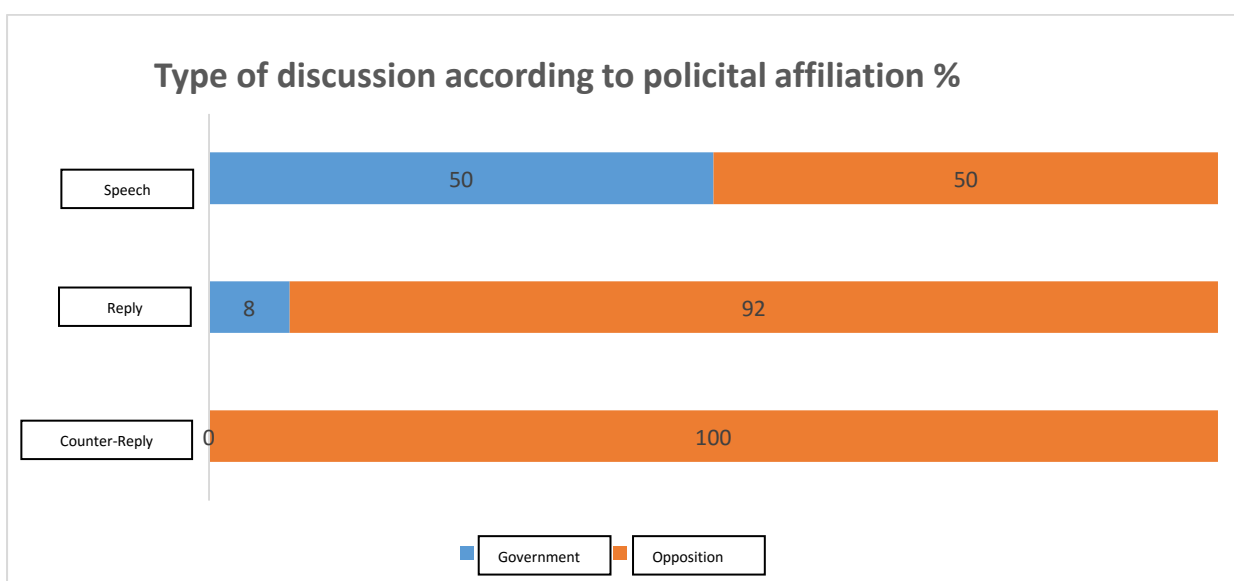
⁴ In the new composition of the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia, the opposition is composed of the coalition led by VMRO-DPMNE and DPA, while the ruling coalition is led by SDSM coalition, DUI, Alliance for Albanians, and Movement BESA.

Dragan Danev	60
Liljana Zaturavska	59
Krsto Jovanovski	57
Traycho Dimkov	57

According to the type of discussions during the constitutive session, the ratio is almost equal. 34% of the discussions were replies, 33% counter-replies, while 32% of the discussions were speeches. Most of the discussion is made up of replies and counter-replies among MPs of the VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition.

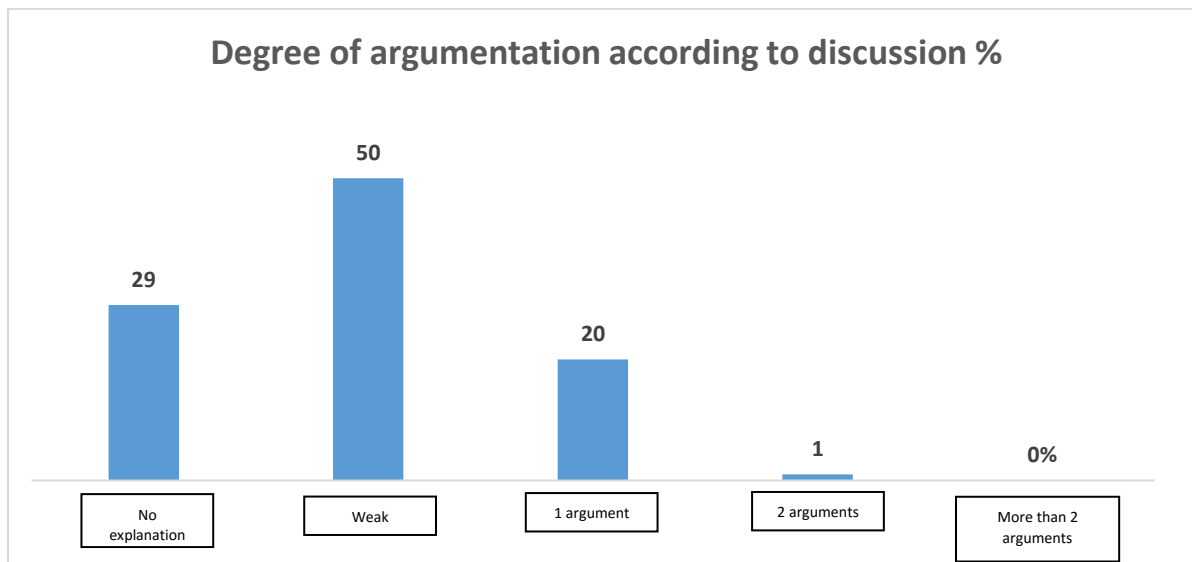


Referring to the type of discussion according to the political affiliation of the speakers, although there is a balance between the government and the opposition in the speeches, the opposition dominates with replies (92%) and counter-replies (100%).

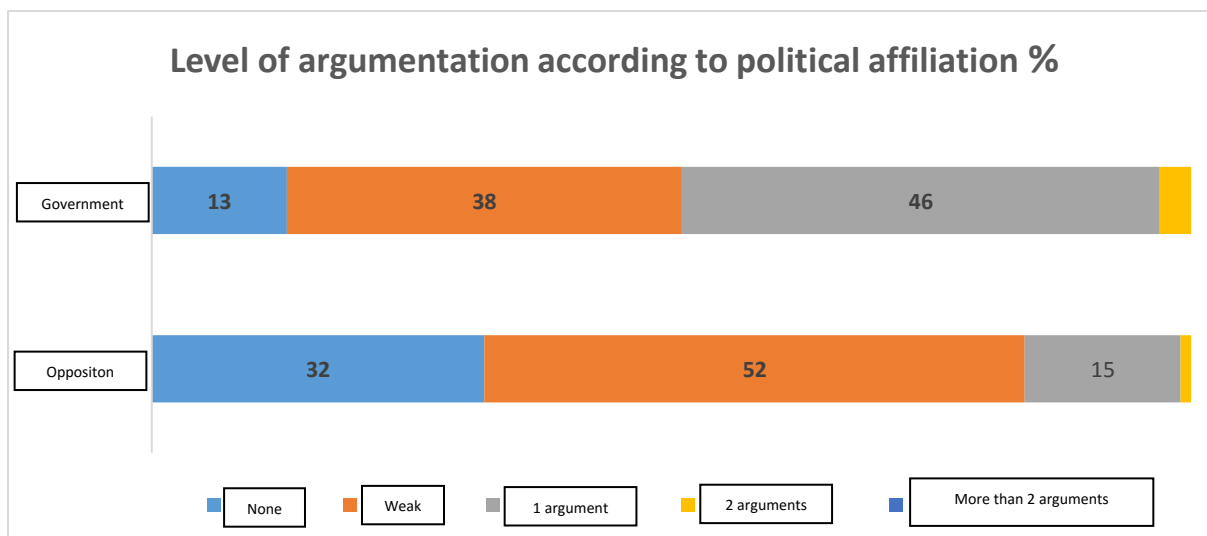


Level of argumentation

In the 29% of the discussion the MPs had no arguments. Half of the discussion is characterized by weak argumentation (50%), while in 20% of the discussion MPs used only one argument to explain their position. The most striking thing is that the MPs in their speeches did not make any effort to use more arguments to strengthen their position.

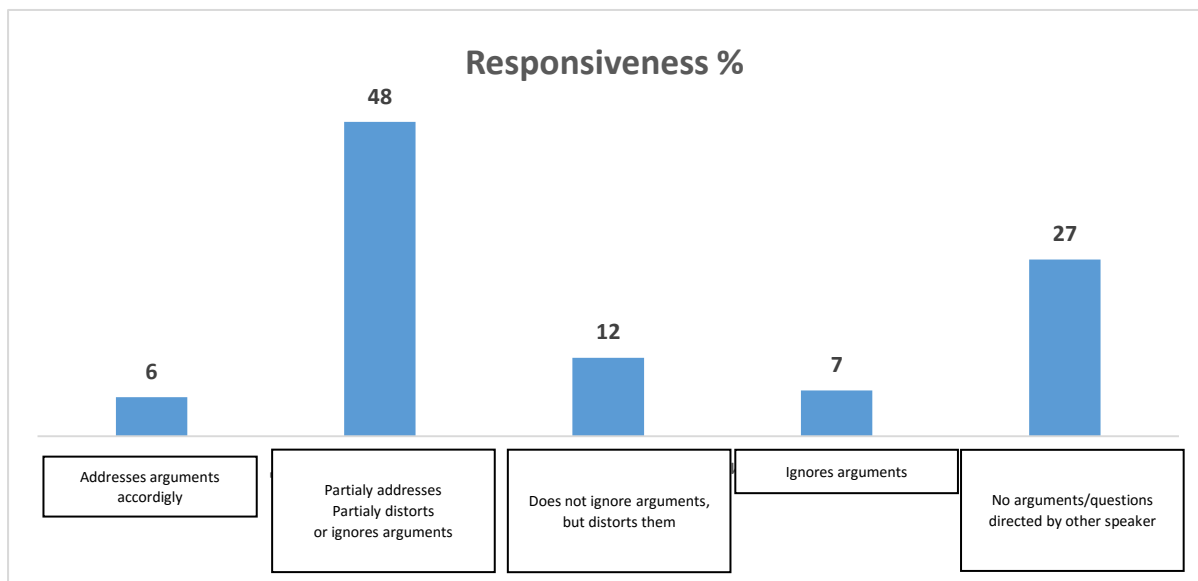


Although the extent of the argumentation of the majority of the discussion is minimal, the degree of argumentation by political affiliation shows that the MPs in power used more arguments in their discussions. In 46% of their discussion, they used one argument, while opposition MPs in only 15%. It is noticeable that a discussion of opposition MPs is characterized by weak argumentation (52%). Opposition MPs also did not use arguments in 32% of their discussions, while MPs in power did not use arguments in only 13% of their discussions.

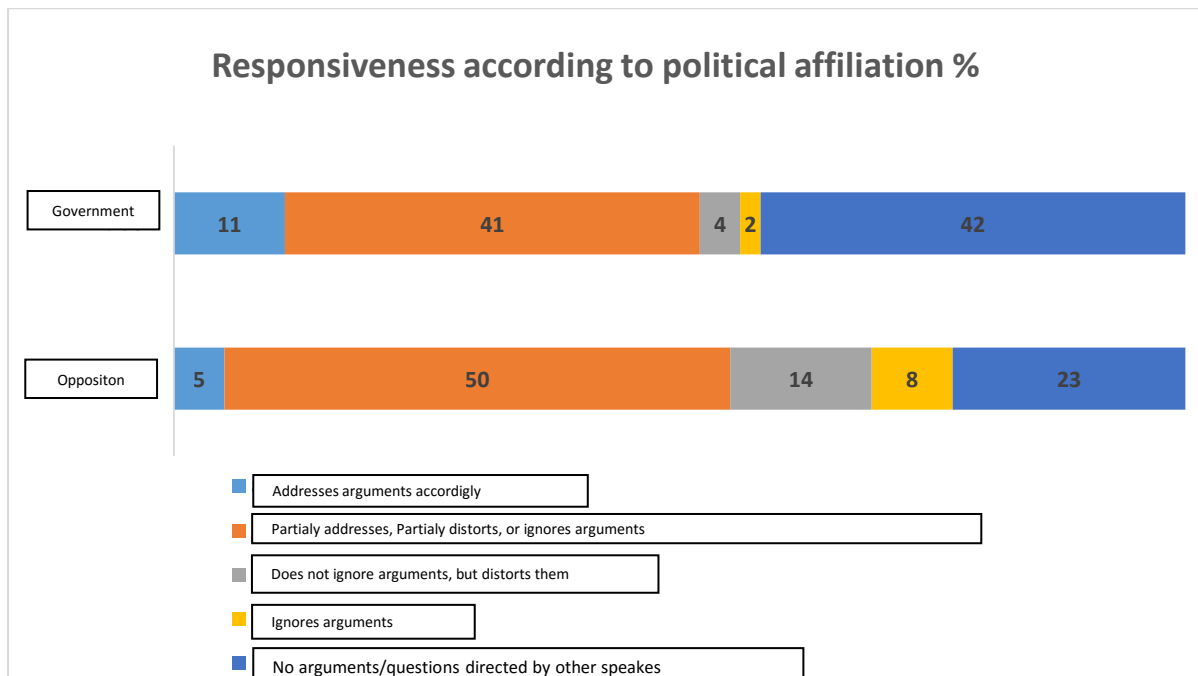


Regarding how the MPs respond to the arguments put forward by other speakers, it follows that they mostly only partially address, partly distort or ignore the arguments (48%). In 7% of cases, the arguments were ignored, and 12% distorted. Also due to the low argumentation of the discussion in

27% there were no arguments or questions raised by another speaker. The most striking is that in only 6% of the discussion, the arguments were appropriately addressed.

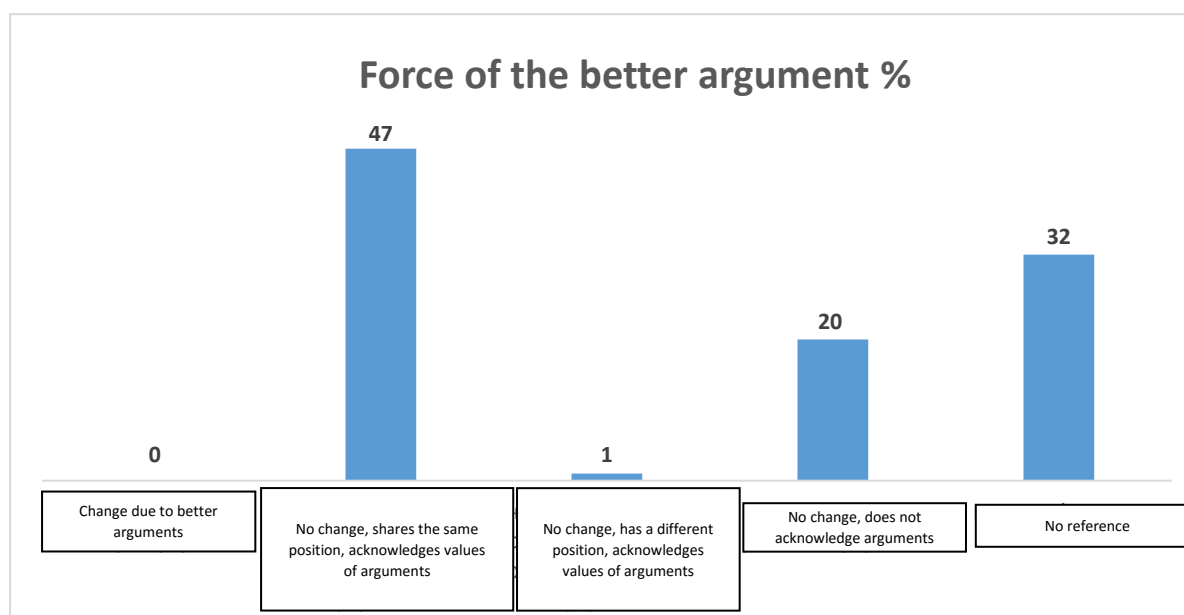


Analyzed according to the political affiliation, the speakers argue that the opposition MPs partially addressed, partly distorted or ignored the arguments of the other in 50% of their statements, also in 14% of the discussion, although they did not ignore the arguments they distorted them. Compared with the opposition, the government in only 2% of their discussion completely ignored the arguments of the other, while the opposition MPs did so in 8% of their speeches.

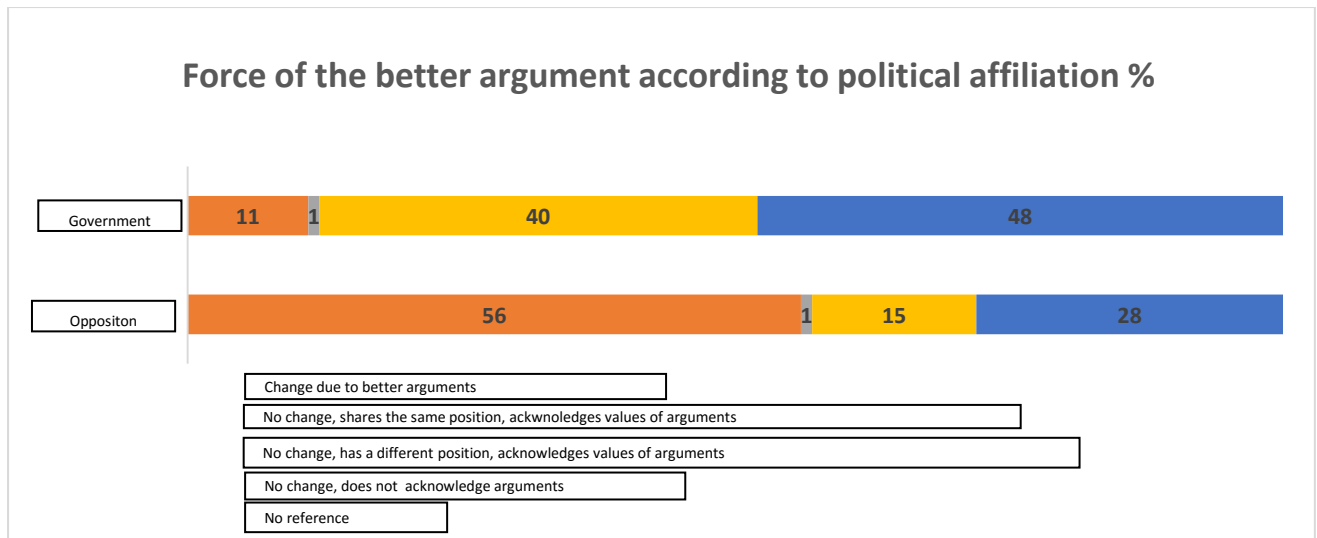


The force of the better argument

Again, as in all the previous periods of observation of the quality of the parliamentary debate, the MPs remain with the constant immutability of attitudes and positions during the discussions. In 32% of the discussion, there was no reference to whether the deputies changed their position, and in 47% of the discussion there was no change in attitudes, because the MPs had the same position, and they recognized the value of the arguments. In 20% of the discussion, the MPs did not change their position, and did not recognize the arguments, and in only 1%, although the MPs had a different position and did not change their position, they accepted the value of the arguments of the other.



This time, apart from the fact that MPs, as in the previous reports of IDSCS, cannot be determined to constructively discuss, the reason for not changing the position is due to the fact that the majority of the discussion was between MPs from the same political party, who most often are supported in their views, with the opposition MPs in 56% of their discussion having no change of attitudes, are in the same position, and recognize the value of arguments. Also, in the rare cases when there was interaction between MPs from different political parties, 15% of the opposition's discussion was characterized by no change of attitude and no arguments were accepted. 40% of the discussion of power is characterized by no change of attitude and no recognition of arguments, while 48% is characterized by no reference.



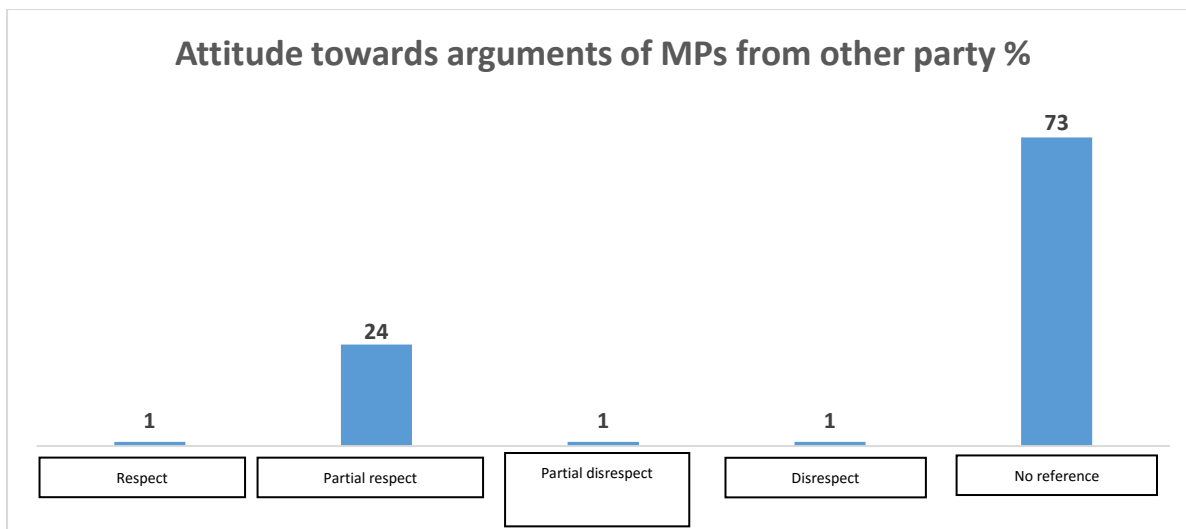
Respect, interruptions and limitations

The indication of various forms of disrespect of arguments may change the eventual correct atmosphere, which is a basic precondition for developing a rational and argumentative debate. At the same time, it can change the course of the discussion and the focus of lawmakers from the arguments to attacks and insults, which further polarizes the atmosphere and disables essential debate.

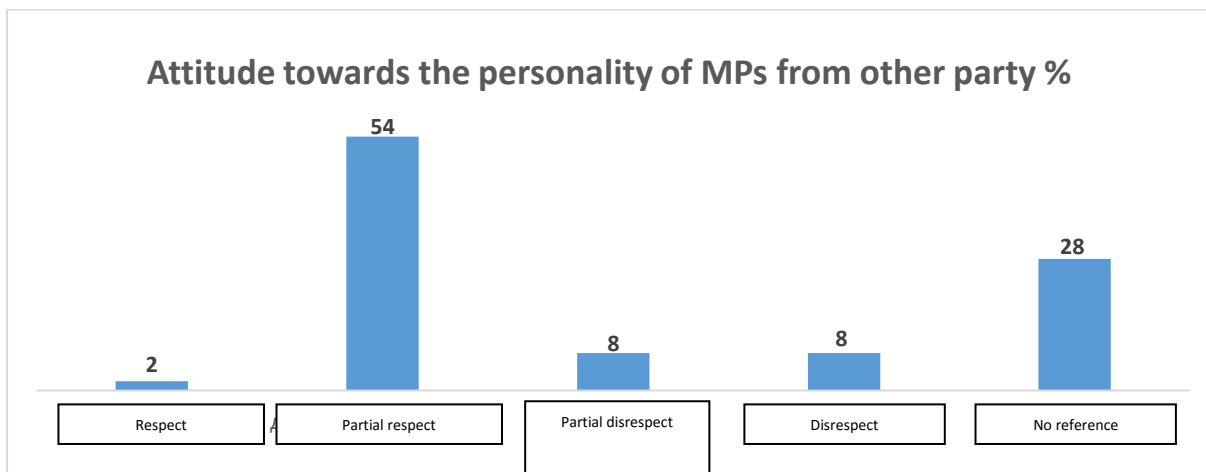
The most worrying thing is that MPs most often direct their attitude towards the personality of other MPs rather than to arguments. It shows that the discussion takes place at the level of comments on someone's person, rather than on a good consideration of the arguments of the other.

This time, unlike other sessions where MPs more often expressed various forms of disrespect for the arguments of their colleagues⁵, they did not express any respect for or disrespect to the arguments of the other speakers in 73% of the discussion, and in 24% of the discussion expressed partial respect. This is mostly due to the fact that the bulk of the discussion, as we pointed out above, was between MPs from the same political party (coalition).

⁵ Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" -Skopje, "Parliament Under Review: How the Members of Parliament Debated from July to October 2016" (February 03, 2017), <http://idscs.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Квалитетот-на-дебатата-во-Собранието-јули-—октомври-2016.pdf>

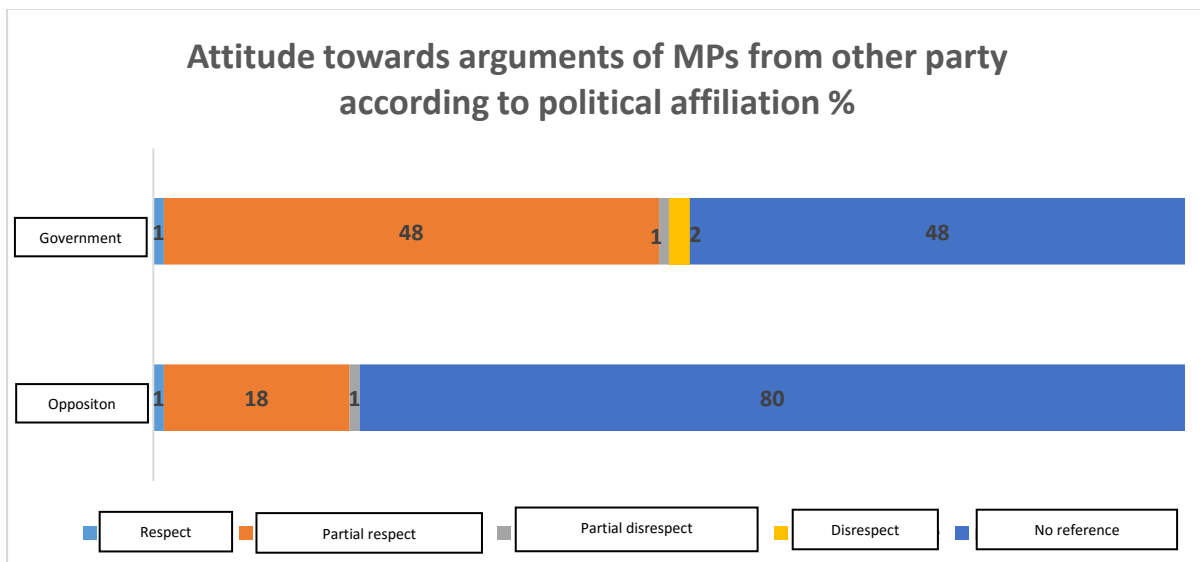


The MPs were more explicit when it came to dealing with the personality of the MPs of the other political parties. The speakers in most of the discussions expressed some kind of attitude towards the personality of the other MPs. Thus, respect is expressed in only 2% of cases, and partial respect in as much as 54% of cases. That means that the MPs in many of the discussions did not resist imposing mocking or milder insulting expressions and attacks on the personality of their counterparts from the opposite political options. In only 8% of cases, a complete disrespect was noted. In these cases, speakers in their discussions expressed complete disrespect for the personality of other MPs - using abusive speech. In 28% of the discussion the MPs did not express any relation to the personality of other MPs.



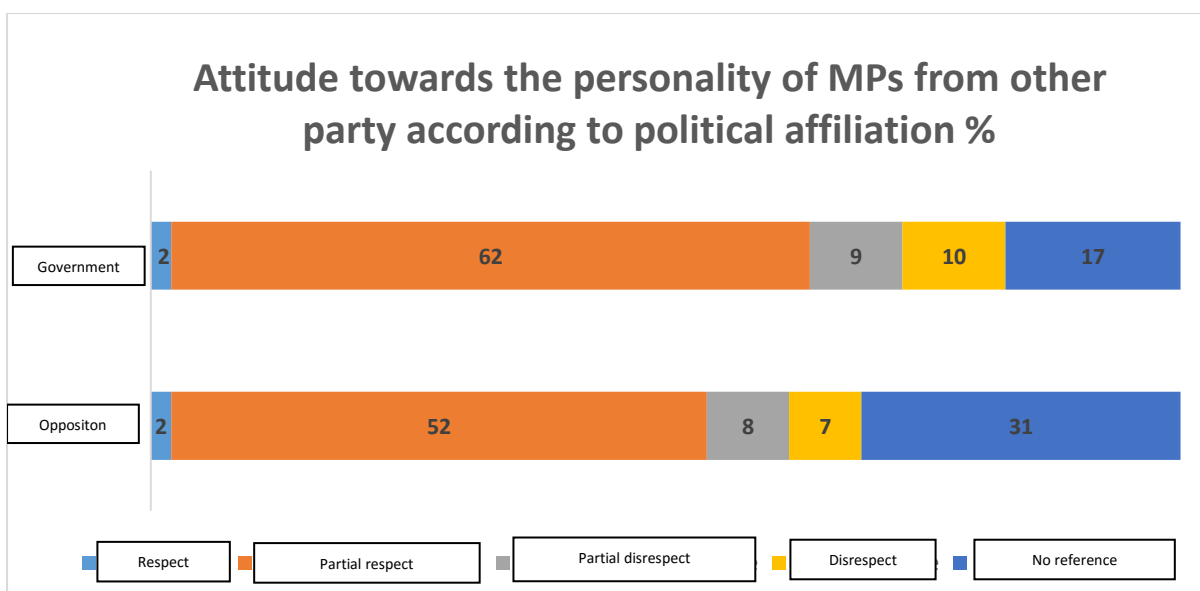
Relation to the arguments and personality of others according to the political affiliation of the MPs

Opposition MPs did not have a general reference to the arguments of MPs from the government in 80% of their speeches, while in 18% of their discussion they had partial respect. The MPs in the government did not have a reference in 48% of their discussion, while in the same percentage (48%) of their discussion they had partial respect for the arguments of the opposition.



In the attitude towards the personality of the other MPs, 52% of the speeches of the opposition expressed partial respect, 8% partial disrespect, while in 7% there was disrespect. In 31% of their speeches, MPs from the opposition did not have a reference to the personality of the other MPs. MPs in power in 62% of their speech had partial respect, 9% partial disrespect and 10% percent total disrespect.

What is important to note is that in only 2% of their speeches, both MPs from the government and the opposition have expressed respect for the personality of their colleagues from another political party.

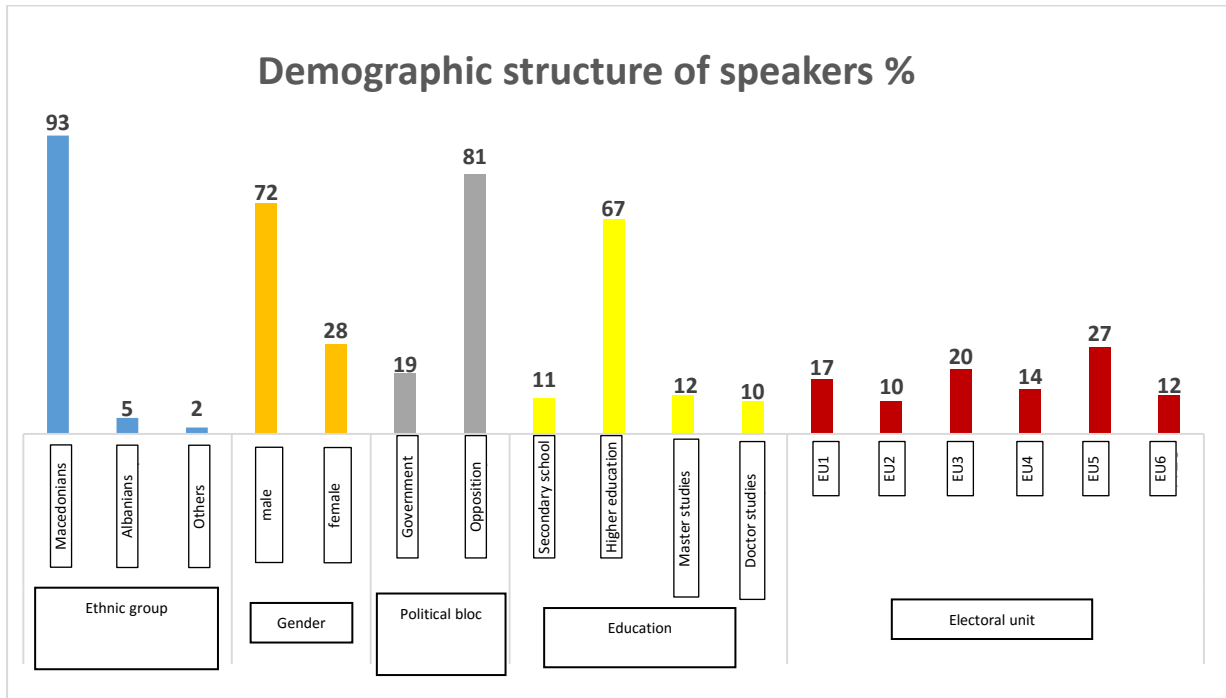


The MPs in this, as in previous periods, rarely used stories, anecdotes or jokes in their discussions. Such elements were observed in a total of 5% of the discussions.

In 6% of the discussions, there was an interruption in the speaker's speech by other MPs, especially in the last sessions where the discussion in the Parliament became more tense. These are interruptions

lasting a maximum of 10 seconds caused mostly by side-comments by speakers who were not given the floor at that moment. After the interruptions, the speakers continued their presentations.

Demographics of speakers



Research methodology

The quality of the debate in the Parliament is analyzed using the “Index for quality of debate”. The index is an instrument that provides each separate act of speech of the monitored session to be coded according to several main characteristics:

- The level of argumentation of the speech (how many arguments there are in each debate);
- The level of respect of the speaker for other MPs and their arguments;
- Openness for accepting others’ arguments and changing one’s position due to higher quality arguments produced in the debate;
- Can the MPs uninterruptedly express their positions?

During the monitoring of the constitutive session of Parliament, due account was taken of the procedural discussions due to their large number. Until the session held on April 26, 2017, the constitutive session had replies of 1,596 minutes, 523 minutes of counter-replies, and **procedural discussions of 1,635 minutes.**

Parliament Watch Project

The Project “Parliament watch” is financed by the Swiss Agency for support and development. It includes 28-month monitoring of the quality of the Parliament debate and monitoring of the media reporting on the work of the Parliament.

The monitoring of the Parliament debate and the media reporting started in September 2015 and will end in December 2017 and will include analyses and publishing the monitoring findings each three months. 9 quarterly monitoring reports about the quality of the Parliament debate and 9 quarterly reports about the media reporting on the work of the Parliament will be made in the project period. Two field surveys on the public opinion about the work of the Parliament will be carried out and the results will published in the framework of the project.

The project represents continuation of the project “Parliament watch, strengthening of the political debate and deliberative discourse” which was financed by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights – EIDHR and was implemented in the period from February 2014 to October 2015.