

ПРОГРАМА ЗА ПАРЛАМЕНТАРНА ПОДДРШКА  
PROGRAMI PËR MBËSHËTETJE PARLAMENTARE  
PARLIAMENT SUPPORT PROGRAMME

Policy Brief No.22/2020

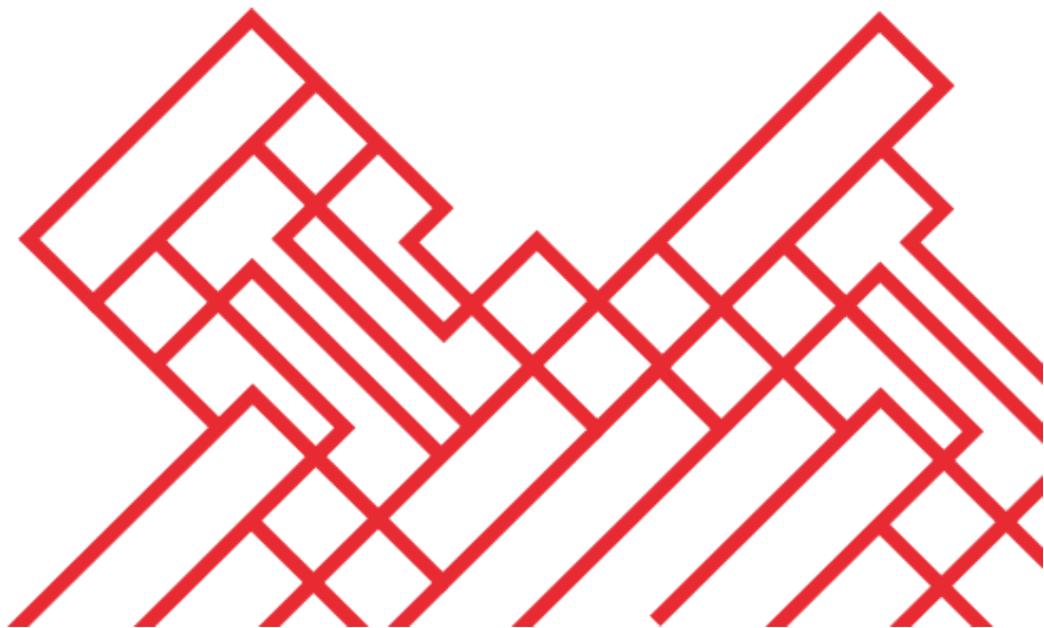
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**Empty discourse or speech based on  
clear justification: Comparative analysis  
of the level of argumentation of discourse  
in the parliaments of North Macedonia,  
Slovenia, and the European Parliament**

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May 2020





*This publication is produced within the Parliamentary Support Programme (PSP), supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) through the Swiss Embassy in the Republic of North Macedonia. PSP is implemented by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" - Skopje (IDSCS) and the Center for Change Management (CCM). The contents of this publication cannot, in any way, be considered to reflect the views of SDC.*

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# Introduction

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Parliaments reach decisions through parliamentary debates. Every year, MPs spend a great many hours debating in Parliament, discussing bills, reports and speeches of other state and government representatives. All debates refer to matters of national or international importance, and the adopted decisions directly shape the lives of citizens and the country's international positions.

The involvement of MPs in parliamentary hearings is with the purpose of improving the quality of laws through a well-argued discussion on their expediency. The parliamentary debate occurs through justifying or refuting rhetorical stances, through which the MPs aim at convincing their colleagues in the logic of their positions. For these reasons, Parliamentary hearings should be based on arguments and evidence put forward by MPs as justification in their speeches, so that decisions are widely adopted by an informed and convinced majority.

The aim of this analysis is to show the level of discourse argumentation of MPs from the latest MP composition (2016 - 2020) of the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia. The level of argumentation in the Macedonian Parliament will be additionally compared with the level of discourse argumentation in the European Parliament and in the Parliament of the Republic of Slovenia. These two parliaments are selected as reference

institutions in which the same methodology for discourse quality assessment is implemented, and due to both of them representing functional institutions within the European Union (EU), in which North Macedonia aspires to become a member. In this way, overview will be given as to how the argumentation of our Parliament's discourse stands compared to EU's parliamentary body, but also compared with Slovenia's Parliament, as an EU member state from the region, that we have significant similarities with from historical and political perspective.

# I. Bibliography: Level of argumentation of MPs' discourse in parliaments

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## Measuring discourse quality in parliaments

Due to the gravity of decisions adopted through debates of MPs, Steenbergen et al. have developed an instrument, named *Discourse Quality Index* (DQI), which gives a final assessment of the overall discourse quality in parliaments. This index includes monitoring of several indicators, which give an assessment of the manner and extent of the expression of positions, as well as of the behaviour of MPs themselves. Some of the indicators monitored via DQI include level of argumentation, interruptions during speeches, attitude towards other participants in the debate, scope of argumentation, and other<sup>1</sup>.

DQI has been applied several times to various parliaments, including the European Parliament, the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia and the Parliament of the Republic of Slovenia. The level of argumentation, i.e. explanation and justification of the attitudes taken by MPs, which, as an indicator, is covered by DQI analyses of these three countries, has been singled out as a point of interest of this analysis.

## Level of argumentation of MEPs' speeches in the European Parliament

With the purpose of presenting the quality of discourse among MEPs in the European Parliament, Lord and Tamvaki adjusted the DQI and applied it to 32 out of a total of 84 plenary sessions that the European Parliament held on 6 topics over the period 2004-2009<sup>2</sup>.

With regard to the level of argumentation of MEPs' speeches, as one of the indicators that were monitored, the authors noted in their analysis that the majority of MEPs' speeches included one or two arguments in which they explicitly stated the reasons for the attitudes taken. Namely, this was the case with 58% of speeches of MEPs. On the other hand, in 43% of speeches, poor argumentation was registered or no argumentation at all, in 10% of which there was no argumentation whatsoever, whereas in 33% the argumentation was poor (Chart 1)<sup>3</sup>.

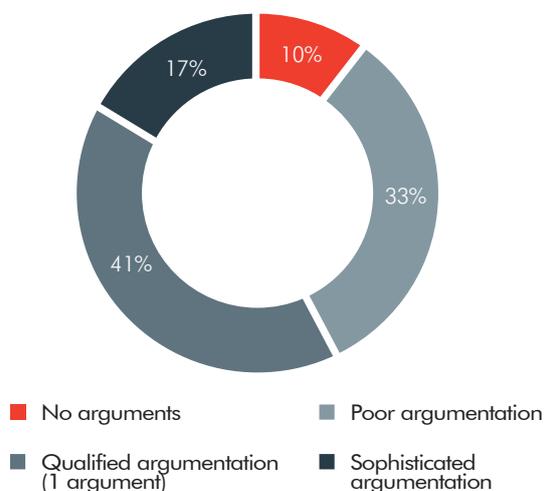
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<sup>1</sup> Steenbergen, Marco R., et al. "Measuring political deliberation: A discourse quality index." *Comparative European Politics* 1.1 (2003).

<sup>2</sup> Lord, Christopher, and Dionysia Tamvaki. "The politics of justification? Applying the 'Discourse Quality Index' to the study of the European Parliament." *European Political Science Review* 5.1 (2013).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

**Chart 1.** Level of discourse argumentation in the European Parliament (%)



Lord and Tamvaki additionally observe that with such results, the European Parliament is in the same line with the level of argumentation of speeches of MPs in national parliaments, such as the British or the German one. Nevertheless, they also note that compared with the Swiss Parliament, where the argumentation quality level with one or several arguments amounts to 80%, there is a significant space for enhancement of speeches in the European Parliament. This difference in discourse argumentation between the European Parliament and the Swiss Parliament is justified by the authors by the fact that, compared with the MPs from the

Swiss Parliament, MEPs work in a more complex environment, where language diversity, political culture, diversity and the type of national democracy systems they come from have a limiting impact on speeches and argumentation<sup>4</sup>.

### Level of argumentation of MPs' speeches in the Parliament of the Republic of Slovenia

Kuhar and Petrovčič adjusted the DQI and applied it to the debates in the Slovenian Parliament referring to the *Family Law* for the period 2009-2011<sup>5</sup>.

Analysing the level of argumentation of MPs' statements, Kuhar and Petrovčič concluded that 77% of MPs' statements contain at least one argument by which they explain their position. On the other hand, in 23% of speeches poor argumentation was registered (15%) or no argumentation whatsoever (8%, Chart 2)<sup>6</sup>

Such level of argumentation in the Slovenian Parliament is quite close with the level in the Swiss Parliament, for which Lord and Tamvaki observe that it ranks on the top when it comes to argument-based discourse<sup>7</sup>. Thus, one may conclude that Slovenian MPs use a significantly larger number of arguments in their speeches compared with their colleagues in the European Parliament.

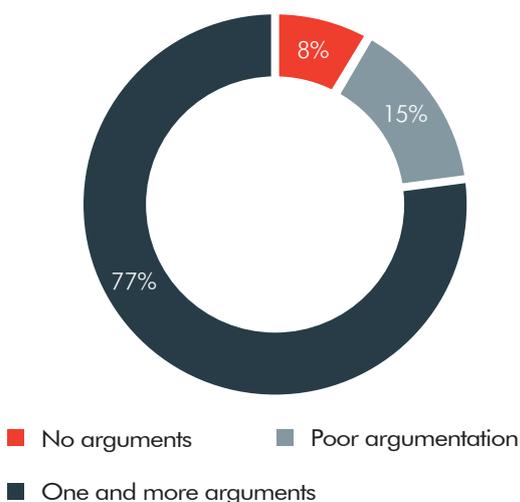
<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Kuhar, Metka, and Andraž Petrovčič. "The Quality of Parliamentary Deliberation: The Case of the Family Code Debates in the Slovenian Parliament." *Javnost-The Public* 24.1 (2017).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Lord, Christopher, and Dionysia Tamvaki. "The politics of justification? Applying the 'Discourse Quality Index' to the study of the European Parliament." *European Political Science Review* 5.1 (2013).

**Chart 2.** Level of discourse argumentation in the Slovenian Parliament (%)



parliamentary working bodies and plenary sessions that include these areas are subject to monitoring.

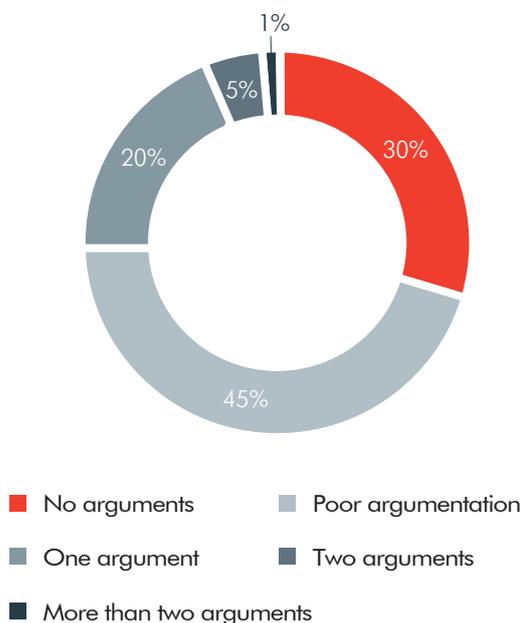
Based on the results received from the monitoring of the discourse of the previous parliamentary composition, over the period 2017 - 2019, it may be concluded that speeches of MPs were generally poorly or not argued at all. Namely, this is the case with 75% of their speeches over the monitored period. In greater detail, it may be noted that the speeches in which no argument was put forward account for on average 30% of the speeches, whereas the ones where the MPs offered an explanation of their positions which is not sufficient to be considered a full argument account for 45%. MPs have put forward one or several arguments in 26% of their speeches in Parliament. (Chart 3)<sup>8</sup>.

## II. Level of argumentation of MPs' discourse in the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia

### Level of (lack of) argumentation of speeches of MPs from the last parliamentary composition (2016 - 2020)

The Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" - Skopje (IDSCS) monitors the discourse quality in Parliament using the DQI since 2014. The monitoring focuses on the discussions referring to the items on the Parliament's agenda within the areas of rule of law, human rights, and democracy. In this sense, the

**Chart 3.<sup>8</sup>** Level of discourse argumentation in the Parliament of North Macedonia 2016-2020 (%)



<sup>8</sup> Average values for the period 2017 – 2019, obtained through the reports: [IDSCS. "Извештај од набљудувањето на квалитетот на дебатата во Собранието, мај-август 2017" \[Report from the monitoring of the discourse quality in Parliament, May - August 2017\]. \(2017\)](#) [IDSCS. "Извештај од набљудувањето на квалитетот на дебатата во Собранието, септември-декември 2017" \[Report from the monitoring of the discourse quality in Parliament, September - December 2017\]. \(2018\)](#) [IDSCS. "Report from the monitoring of the discourse quality in Parliament, January - June 2018," \(2018\)](#) [IDSCS. "Report from the monitoring of the discourse quality in Parliament, July - December 2018," \(2019\)](#) [ИДЦС. "Report from the monitoring of the discourse quality in Parliament, January - June 2019," \(2019\)](#) [IDSCS. "Report from the monitoring of the discourse quality in Parliament, July - December 2019," \(2020\)](#)

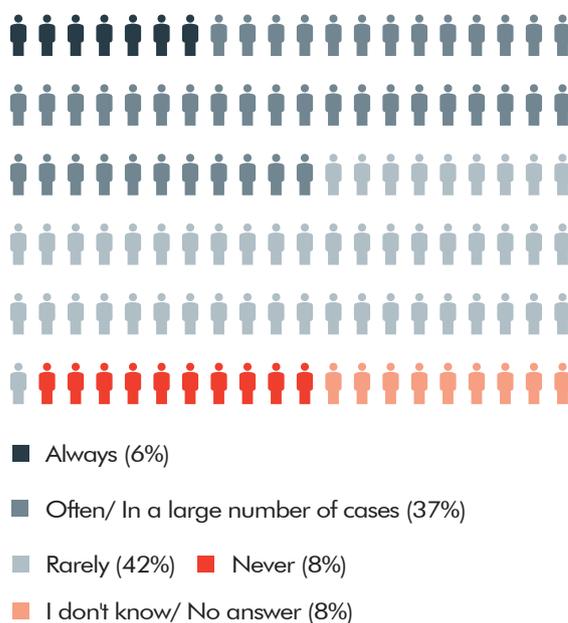
## Citizens' perceptions about the level of argumentation of parliamentary debates

Democratic processes motivate citizens to form opinions on a high number of policy-related questions in the country. Citizens' perceptions are powerful agents of change, which exert additional pressure on political institutions, since they are the ones shaping election results and leading to election or fall of ruling structures.

Over the period 2009 - 2019, IDSCS continuously monitored citizens' perceptions about the work of Parliament. One of the questions present in surveys relates particularly to citizens' opinion as to how much MPs put forward arguments or explanations in their speeches.

The results point out that citizens' perceptions about this topic are in line with the extent to which MPs really use arguments in their speeches. About one-half of the citizens continuously have a negative perception, i.e. they think that the MPs from the last parliamentary composition rarely or never used arguments in their speeches. On the other hand, the percentage of citizens who think that MPs often or always based their speeches on arguments while expressing their positions is about 42% (Chart 4)<sup>9</sup>.

**Chart 4.** Citizens' perception: How often are arguments used in debates among MPs in Parliament?



<sup>9</sup> Average values for the period 2018 – 2020, obtained through the reports: IDSCS. "Results from the field survey on citizens' perceptions about the work of Parliament" (2018) [IDSCS. "Results from the field survey on citizens' perceptions about the work of Parliament" \(2019\)](#) IDSCS. "Rezultatet nga anketa në terren mbi perceptimet e qytetarëve për punën e Kuvendit" (2020)

### III. Where does discourse argumentation in the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia stand compared to other parliaments?

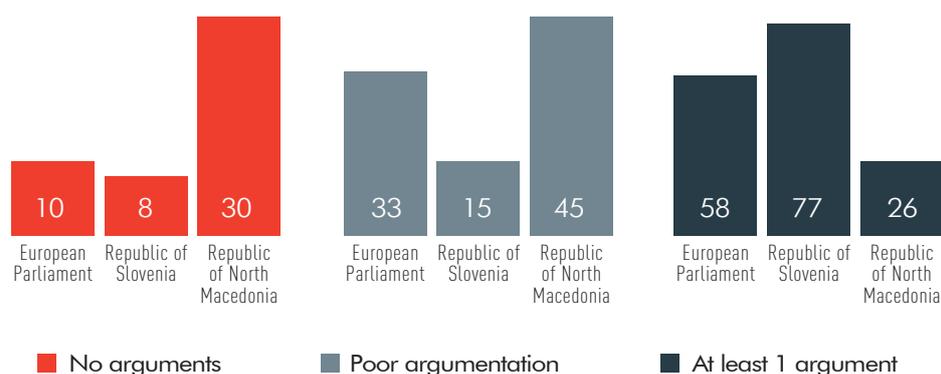
The comparative analysis of the level of argumentation of the discourse of MEPs in the European Parliament and of MPs in the parliaments of Slovenia and North Macedonia observes that the level of argumentation of speeches of MPs in North Macedonia is significantly lower.

The percentage of speeches in which MPs offered at least one full justification to their position amounts to 26% in North Macedonia, being lower by 32 percentage points compared with the

average in the European Parliament (58%), i.e. 51 percentage points lower compared with the average in the Republic of Slovenia. Accordingly, a significant difference is also noticeable in the percentage of speeches of MPs in which no argument was used as justification to the speech. The percentage of such speeches in the European Parliament and in the Parliament of Slovenia is almost the same and amounts to 10%, i.e. 8% respectively. On the other hand, this situation is observed in almost one third of speeches in the Parliament of North Macedonia (30%), i.e. it is by 20 percentage points higher as to the European Parliament and the Parliament of Slovenia (Chart 5).

When it comes to the percentage of speeches in which MPs provided explanation of their positions, which is not sufficient to be considered a full argument, this is by 12 percentage points higher in North Macedonia (45%) compared with the European Parliament (33%), i.e. 30 percentage points higher compared with the Parliament of Slovenia (Chart 5).

**Chart 5.** Level of discourse argumentation in the parliaments of: (%)



## Conclusion and recommendations

The discourse culture of MPs in our country, justified by clear and firm arguments directly supporting the position taken, is on a significantly low level. A predominating number of discussions having taken place among MPs from the last parliamentary composition of the Republic of North Macedonia over the period 2017 - 2019 contain poor argumentation or no argumentation whatsoever. In other words, most of the positions that MPs represented in Parliament were not based on evidence and no appropriate explanations were provided in this regard. Citizens have objectively perceived such situation as well, the majority of whom assessed the actual low level of argumentation of MPs' speeches, assessing that MPs rarely or never use arguments in their speeches.

These conditions position the Parliament of North Macedonia far below the average of the European Parliament and the Parliament of Slovenia. The percentage of speeches in which Macedonian MPs offered at least one justification to their position is twice lower compared with the percentage of MEPs and notably three times lower compared with Slovenian MPs. Accordingly, the percentage of speeches of Macedonian MPs in which they do not put forward appropriate argumentation thus justifying their position is twice higher than is the case with their colleagues from the European Parliament, i.e. three times higher compared with their colleagues from the Parliament of Slovenia.

Due to these reasons, an increase of the debate quality and level of argumentation of MPs' speeches

in the Parliament of North Macedonia is necessary. In order to achieve this goal, the MPs have several tools at their disposal, however, there is also a need for the introduction of additional mechanisms and practices.

**The increase of awareness and knowledge on topics that are subject to discussion, as well as the improvement of MPs' debating and oratory skills can significantly contribute to higher quality debates in Parliament.** The Parliamentary Institute (PI), which operates within the Parliament, offers services that address these MPs' needs. Namely, PI conducts research on topics in MPs' interest as well as educates and provides training for MPs in specific areas. Having this in mind, the MPs need to utilize PI's services more regularly and effectively.

**The inclusion of Parliament in the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) process would significantly increase the quality and argumentation of Parliamentary discussions.** RIA contributes to the improvement of quality decision making, provides information on the effects and consequences of proposed regulations, assess and monitors the implementation of existing regulations. The Government, which is the dominant submitter of legislative proposals in the country, uses this tool, while the Parliament does not. This places Parliament in the role of an evaluator of Government's proposals. However, the Parliament is inconsistent in the performance of this role because MPs' insufficiently focus on the content of the proposed regulations, and most

of the time they poorly justify their discussions.<sup>10</sup> Hence, the application of RIA in the Assembly and the active practice of RIA by the MPs as submitters of legislative proposals has the potential to increase the debate quality in Parliament and contribute to informed decision-making.<sup>11</sup>

**MPs should not abuse the shortened procedure for adoption of legislative proposals and the European flag.** The shortened or emergency procedure reduces the time for debates and forecasts shorter deadlines for conclusion of the discussion. In some cases, the MPs even vote without previous discussion. Restrictions of the discussion in Parliament are also envisaged for the regulation in which the European flag is used, which signifies harmonization of law with the legislation of the European Union.<sup>12</sup> The abuse of these restrictions in the debate between MPs has negative reflection on its quality, denies the right of speech of the MPs and deprives them of making an informed decision. Such abuse inevitably results in hasty and ineligible legal solutions.

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<sup>10</sup> Dimeski, Jane "Debate from trenches" IDSCS, 2015, available at: <https://idscs.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/>

<sup>11</sup> Bliznakovski, Jovan "Comparative good practices of the application of the RIA and opportunities of their implementation in Macedonia" IDSCS, 2017, available at: <https://idscs.org.mk/>

<sup>12</sup> Dimitrievski, Dejan "Донесување на закон во скратена или итна постапка" [Adopting a law in a shortened or urgent procedure] Parliamentary Institute, 2017, available at: <https://www.sobranie.mk/content/PI/>

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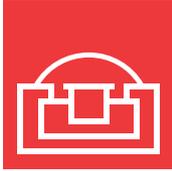
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