

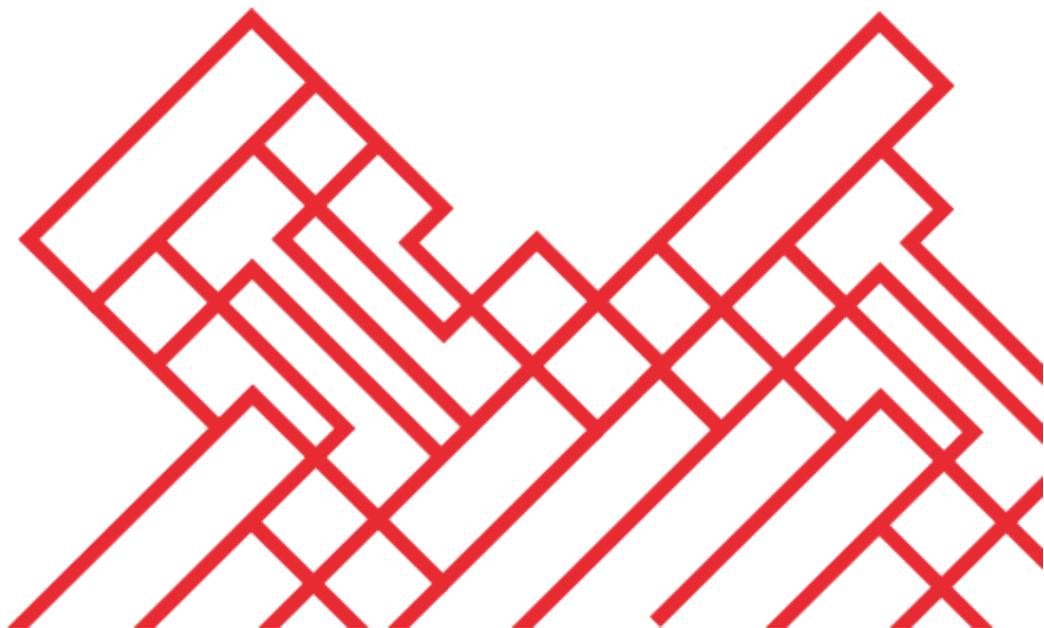
ПРОГРАМА ЗА ПАРЛАМЕНТАРНА ПОДДРШКА
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The citizens and the Assembly of North Macedonia: Trust on shaky ground

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Summary

This analysis provides a comparative overview of the trust that the citizens of North Macedonia have in the Assembly in relation to other democratic countries in the world. The analysis also shows how this trust is distributed among different social groups of citizens and how the perception of citizens about the work of the Assembly reflects on their trust in this institution.

Legislatures are key decision-making institutions in democratic political systems, which means that the low trust citizens have in the Assembly indicates doubt about the real practice of democracy in the society. If citizens doubt the work of their representatives in the legislature, it is very likely that they will also doubt the objectivity of the decisions coming from this institution.

Worldwide surveys indicate that citizens in democracies generally have low trust in the legislatures of their country. This level of distrust is a warning sign to representative democracies, which raises the question of how functional it is when the majority of citizens do not trust key democratic institutions.

The trust that the citizens of North Macedonia have in the Assembly is in line with the low trust in other

countries with a democratic system of government in the world. This year's survey shows the lowest level of trust in the last four years in the country. The analysis additionally indicates that the trust in the Assembly is not evenly distributed among the different social groups in society. Thus, the citizens who are representatives of a group at risk of social exclusion, have a lower degree of trust in the Assembly compared to other social groups.

The analysis also shows that trust in the legislature is based on citizens' perceptions of how the Assembly performs its functions, and how transparent and open it is to the public. Hence, the citizens who believe that the Assembly properly performs its constitutional competencies and is open to cooperation with the public, have the highest level of trust in the institution as a whole.

The Assembly must make serious efforts to raise the level of trust of the citizens. This can be achieved by improving the quality of performance of its constitutionally defined functions, primarily the oversight function; building and nurturing a close and direct relationship with the public; as well as putting the groups at risk of social exclusion in the focus of their work.

1. Introduction

Legislatures are the key decision-making institutions in countries with democratic systems of government. The legal norms in the society are adopted there, the state budget is concluded and the general political flow in the country is formed. Hence, if the citizens have low trust in the Parliament, it is very likely that they will doubt the objectivity of the decisions arising from this institution.

The political literature notes that the modern form of democracy is necessarily representative, as it is the only way to answer the question of how people should govern themselves.¹ In that context, the Assembly as the highest representative body of the citizens is a critical institution through which the citizens can practice democracy in the society

and "self-government". For these reasons, low trust in the Parliament indicates that citizens doubt that their interests are sufficiently represented in this institution and contributes to the deterioration of democracy in the society. Moreover, worldwide surveys indicate that citizens in most democracies generally have low trust in the legislature.

The purpose of this analysis is to make a comparative overview of the trust that the citizens of North Macedonia have in the Parliament in relation to other democratic countries in the world. Additionally, the analysis provides an overview of how this trust is distributed among different social categories of citizens in the country and correlates with how the citizens' perception of the work of the Assembly reflects on the trust in this institution.

¹ A) Sartori, G. (1987) *The Theory of Democracy Revisited*. Chatham, NJ: Chatham House
B) Schedler, A. (1999) "Conceptualizing Accountability." In *The Self-Restraining State: Power and Accountability in New Democracies*, ed. Andreas Schedler, Larry Diamond, and Marc F. Plattner. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner
Note: It is also due to practical issues, direct democracy on a regular basis is almost impossible in modern countries, although there are identified ways for involving citizens directly in the decision-making process, such as referendums.

2. Level of trust in legislatures around the world

The research conducted by Holmberg et al. in 2017, concludes that in most democracies, the majority of citizens do not trust the parliaments of their states. The target of their study of democratic forms of government is 27 countries of the so-called "new democracies"² and 15 of the so-called "old democracies"³. The results show that in only 4 of the "old democracies", more than half of the citizens stated that they trust the Parliament, while in the "new democracies" this was the case in only two countries. The average percentage of citizens from the "old democracies" who said they trusted parliaments was 40%, while in the "new democracies" this percentage was 11 percentage points lower at 29%. In the case of all other democracies, the majority of citizens do not trust their legislatures.⁴

Duffin (2020) explores the trust that citizens of European Union (EU) member states have in key institutions in their countries. Among the institutions of interest in the analysis are national parliaments, national governments and the judicial system. The results show that only one third of EU

citizens said they trusted the national parliament (34%) and the national government (34%) in their country, which is in fact the lowest percentage compared to other institutions. EU citizens are divided over their confidence in the judicial system of their countries (Chart 1).

Trust in national parliaments in almost all EU member states is significantly lower than the trust that citizens have in the other studied institutions. However, a few countries present an exception, such as the Netherlands and Sweden, where the results showed that the majority of citizens trust all of these institutions⁵ (Chart 1).

The results of various surveys are consistent with the fact that the majority of citizens living in countries with a democratic system of government generally do not trust the legislature and the executive in their country. This high level of distrust is a warning signal for representative democracy, which raises the question of how functional it is when the majority of citizens do not trust key democratic institutions.

² India, Ghana, Cyprus, Thailand, South Africa, Estonia, Uruguay, Indonesia, Georgia, Taiwan, Ecuador, Moldova, Trinidad and Tobago, South Korea, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Bulgaria, Bulgaria, Colombia, Serbia, Colombia, Serbia Poland, Peru, Tunisia and Slovenia.

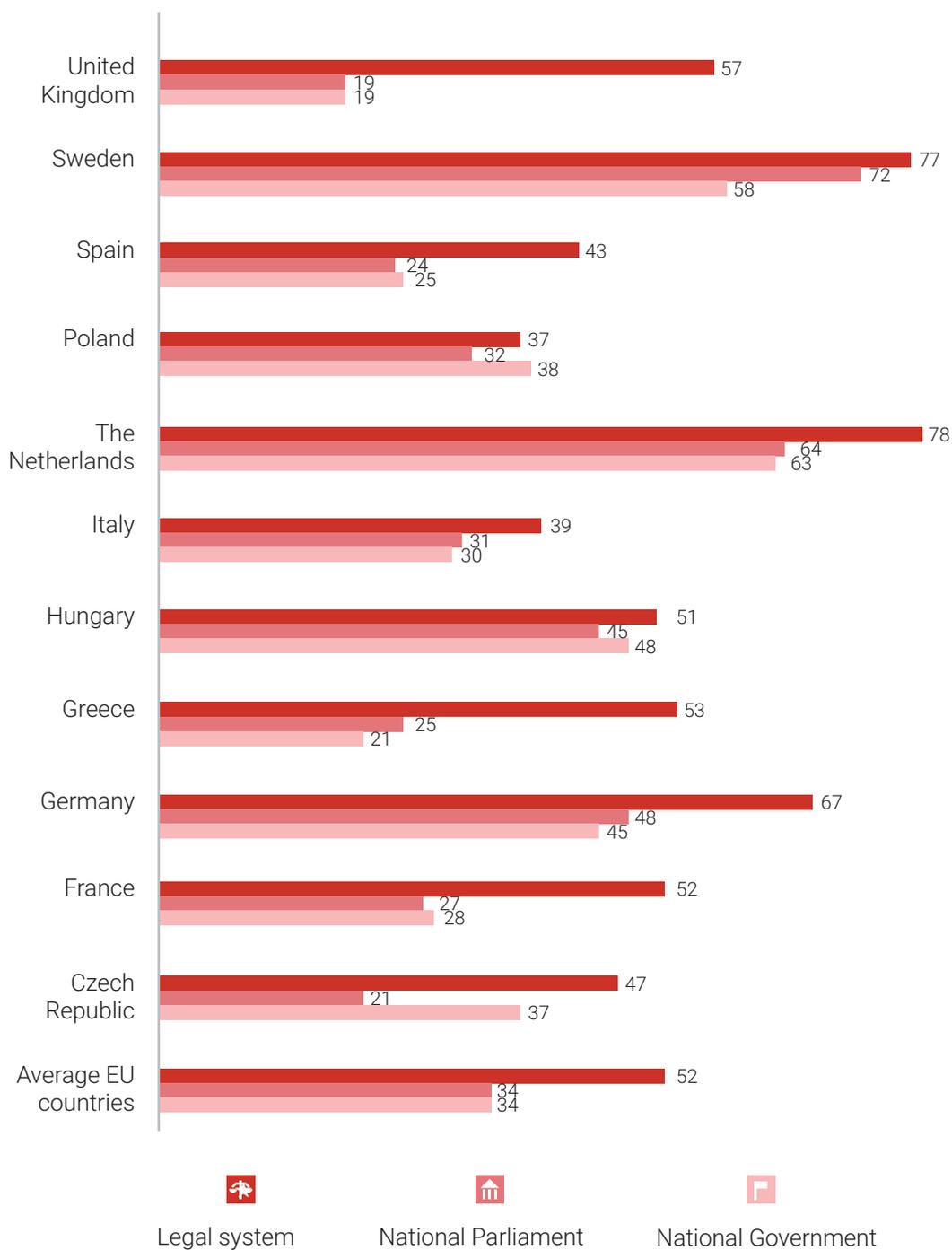
³ Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, Finland, Germany, New Zealand, Canada, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Spain, France, Italy, Australia, Japan and the United States.

⁴ Holmberg, Soren, Staffan Lindberg, and Richard Svensson. "Trust in parliament." *Journal of Public Affairs* 17.1-2 (2017): e1647.

⁵ Duffin, E. (2020) Share of Europeans who trust key institutions in selected countries 2019. Statista.com. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1108375/trust-key-institutions-selected-european-countries/#statisticContainer>

Chart 1. Level of trust in state institutions (%)

Citizens of EU countries have a low level of trust in their countries' national parliaments



Source: Duffin, E. (2020) ⁶

⁶ Duffin, E. (2020) Share of Europeans who trust key institutions in selected countries 2019. Statista.com. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1108375/trust-key-institutions-selected-european-countries/#statisticContainer>

3. The trust of the citizens in the Assembly of North Macedonia

3.1. Level of trust in the Assembly compared to other institutions in the country

The results of a field survey conducted by the Institute for Democracy (IDSCS) in 2020, showed that the level of trust that citizens have in the legislature is the lowest in the past four years.⁷ Thus, on a scale from 1 - lowest to 10 - highest, citizens position their trust on an average score of 4 in 2020, which compared to 2017 when the level of trust was rated at 4.8 is a drop of 0.8 percentage points on the scale (Chart 2).

The results indicate the lowest trust of the citizens in all institutions involved in the research in the last four years. Thus, in 2020, the highest level of trust was in

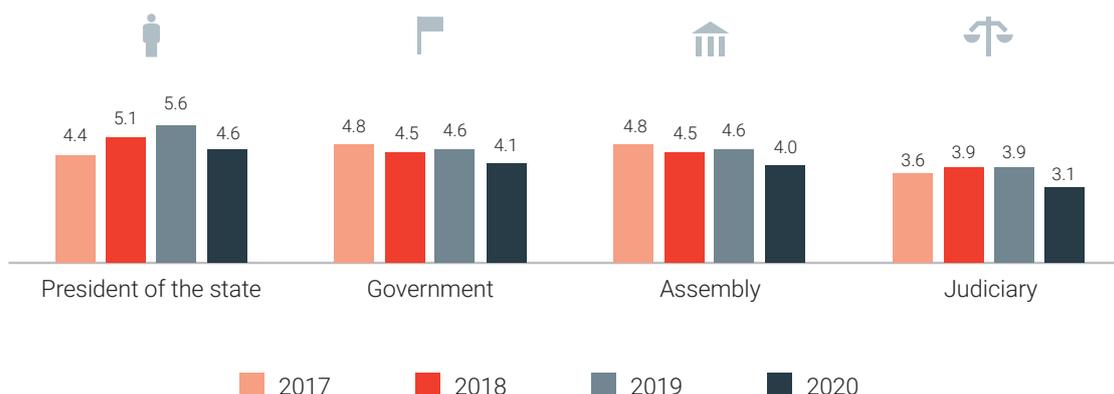
the President of the country, who was rated with an average score of 4.6, however, compared to 2019, when the level of trust was rated at 5.6, his rating dropped by 1 percentage point. The trust of citizens in the Government is assessed relatively equal to the trust in the Assembly, i.e. 4.1. Lower than the trust in the Assembly, is the trust in the judiciary 3.1 (Chart 2).

These results indicate that the level of trust that the citizens of North Macedonia have in the state institutions, is in line with the low trust that is observed in other democracies in the world. However, the trend of significant decline in confidence in the legislature, the executive and the judiciary calls into question the smooth functioning of democracy and its principles.

⁷ Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" (2020) Results from the field survey of the citizens' perceptions about the work of the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia: shorturl.at/yAFHS

Chart 2. Trust in institutions on a scale of 1 to 10

2020 shows a declining trend of trust in institutions
(On a scale of 1 to 10, describe how much you trust the following institutions)



3.2. The level of trust in the Assembly across different social groups

The Assembly, as the highest representative body of the citizens, is ideally a non-partisan institution that equally represents the interests of all citizens, thus stimulating an equal level of trust throughout society and across all social and economic groups. The differentiated results from the IDSCS research indicate that this is not the case for some of the social groups.

The analysis shows that there is almost no difference in the level of trust of men and women in the legislature of North Macedonia. Thus, on a scale from 1 lowest to 10 highest, women rated trust with an average score of 4.1, while men with 4.0.

On the other hand, if the results are analyzed in terms of economic status and age group of respondents, it can be seen that the level of trust varies across different groups. Thus, the senior respondents (65+ years old) have the lowest trust in the Assembly (3.6), while the respondents aged 30-39 years, have the highest score of 4.4 (Chart 3).

Chart 3. Confidence in the Assembly by age

The oldest group of citizens with the lowest trust in the Assembly
(On a scale of 1-10, rate your confidence in the Assembly)

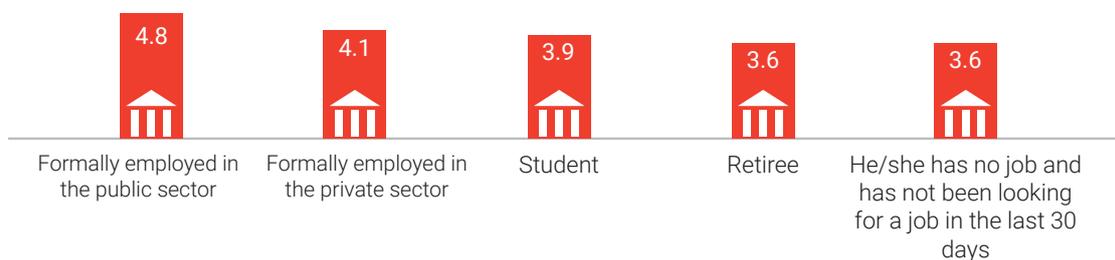


Differences are also observed in various economic groups of citizens. In line with the age group results, retirees reported the lowest level of confidence in the Assembly (3.6), the same score as with the unemployed (3.6). Public sector employees have the highest levels of trust, rated at 4.8. Private sector employees

rated their confidence in Parliament at 4.1, while youth/students at 3.9 (Chart 4). These results indicate that the trust of groups at higher risk of social exclusion, such as the unemployed, retirees and students, have the lowest trust in their representatives in the Assembly.

Chart 4. Confidence in the Assembly according to Economic status

Regarding the economic status, the unemployed and the pensioners with the lowest trust in the Assembly
(On a scale of 1-10, rate your confidence in the Assembly)



3.3. The influence of the citizens' perception of the work of the Assembly on their trust in this institution

The trust of the citizens in the Assembly is closely related to their perception of the work of the Assembly and its openness and involvement of the public. Thus, the citizens who perceive the

Parliament as an important factor in the political sphere of the country, have significantly greater trust in this institution (4.4, on a scale of 1-10). Accordingly, the trust of the citizens who stated that they believe that the Assembly plays an insignificant role in the political life of the country, is the lowest (3.2, on a scale of 1-10) (Chart 5).

Chart 5. Perception of the role of the Assembly in society and trust

Citizens who see the Assembly as an important factor in the political life of the country, have more confidence in that institution
(On a scale of 1-10, rate your confidence in the Assembly)



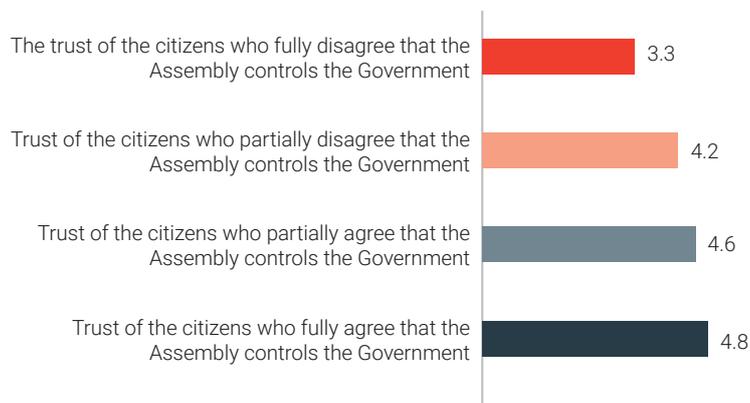
Furthermore, this correlation is confirmed through the citizens' perception of how well the Assembly performs its oversight function. The citizens who think that the Assembly performs this function well and controls the executive branch, have the highest level of trust in the Assembly (4.8). As the confidence

of citizens in how much the Assembly controls the Government decreases, so does the level of trust. The citizens who believe that the Assembly does not exercise its oversight function at all and does not control the work of the Government, have the lowest trust in the Assembly with a score of 3.3 (Chart 6).

Chart 6. Perception of the oversight role of the Assembly and trust

Citizens who believe that the Assembly performs its oversight function show higher levels of trust in the Assembly

(On a scale of 1-10, rate your confidence in the Assembly)



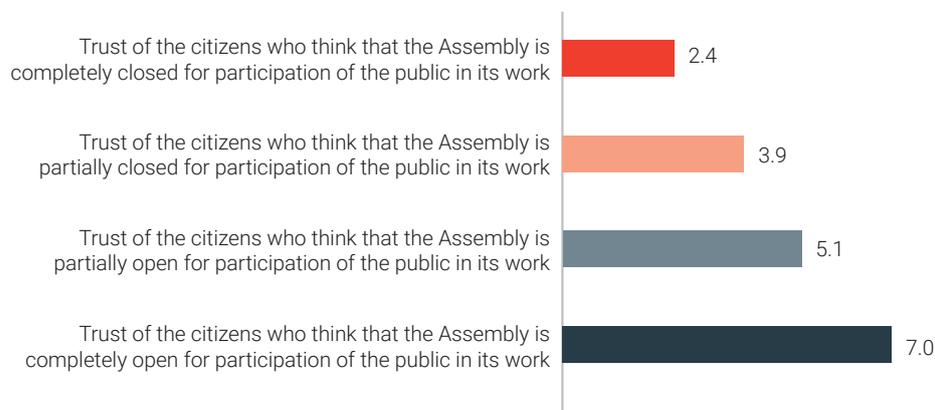
Moreover, the relationship between the trust in the Assembly and the citizens' perception of its openness for public participation in its work is especially evident. Namely, the results indicate that the trust in the Assembly grows in direct proportion to the citizens' perception of its openness. Namely,

the citizens who think that the Assembly is completely open, on a scale from 1 to 10 evaluate their trust in this institution with 7, while those who think that the Assembly is completely closed, evaluate the trust with 2.4 (Chart 7).

Chart 7. The perception of the openness of the Assembly and trust

The citizens who think that the Assembly is open to the public, have higher trust in this institution

(On a scale of 1-10, rate your confidence in the Assembly)



4. Conclusion

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Citizens' trust in national parliaments of their respective countries is declining. The majority of citizens of democracies around the world say their trust in the legislature is lower than their trust in other state institutions.

In line with this trend, the trust of citizens in the Assembly in North Macedonia is the lowest in the last four years, and is lower in relation to the trust in the executive branch. This decline of trust in the legislature sends a serious warning signal for the essential practice of democracy in the country. If the majority of citizens show a low level of trust in their democratically elected representatives in the Assembly, the credibility of the institution as a whole is questioned.

The trust of citizens in the Assembly is closely related to their perception of the work of the Assembly and its openness and involvement of

the public. Thus, the citizens who believe that the Assembly successfully performs its constitutional functions and who believe that the Assembly is open to public participation in its work have the highest trust in this institution. Accordingly, the citizens that show the lowest levels of trust in the Assembly, believe that the legislature is completely closed to the public and controlled by the Government.

Citizens' trust in the Parliament also varies between different social and age groups, and is lower among the representatives of the groups with higher risk of social exclusion. Thus, the oldest group of citizens trust the legislature the least, while the citizens aged 30 to 39 have the highest level of trust compared to other age groups. Regarding the economic status, the highest level of trust is observed among the employees in the public sector, as opposed to the pensioners (retirees) and the unemployed who have the lowest level of trust.

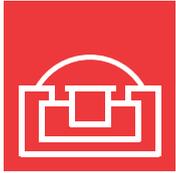
5. Recommendations

The Assembly must make serious efforts to raise the level of public trust. This can be achieved by improving the quality of performance of its constitutionally defined functions, **and above all the oversight function**. The majority of citizens are convinced that the Assembly has no control over the work of the Government, which negatively affects their levels of trust. MPs should actively and substantially practice the oversight mechanisms available to them.

In order to increase the trust of the citizens, the Assembly should also build and maintain a close and direct relationship with the public. Citizens should have a smooth and regular insight into the work of the Assembly, as well as an open channel for two-way communication with their representatives. This can be achieved by improving the content and tools for informing the public that the Assembly uses, such as the Assembly TV channel, the Assembly website and social media profiles. Direct

contact with citizens can be exercised through the activation of the existing constituency offices for communication with citizens which should be located in all municipalities throughout the country. Additionally, the Assembly should invest in more intensive education of the citizens about the possibilities for their involvement in the work of the Assembly.

The Assembly should focus its work on groups at risk of social exclusion. The trust that the citizens of these groups have in the Assembly is lower than other groups of citizens. This is significantly noticeable in terms of economic status and age of citizens. It is necessary for the representatives of the citizens to pay special attention to the needs of different social groups, especially by assessing the impact that the work of the Assembly has on their lives. In this way, they will contribute to concrete solutions to improve the status of these groups in society, and thus increase their trust in the Assembly.



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