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Parliament Watch: Monitoring report on the debate quality in the Parliament (August - December 2020)

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Introduction

The Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis” - Skopje (IDSCS) monitors the discourse quality in the Assembly and the media coverage about the work of the Assembly since June 2014. In the first cycle, the monitoring was conducted for a period of 10 months, i.e. from June 2014 to May 2015. The second period of monitoring and assessment of the parliamentary debate and media coverage quality, supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, started in September 2015 and lasted until December 2017. The third monitoring period of the discourse quality started in January 2018 and lasted until December 2019.

As of January 2020, The Institute for Democracy monitors the work of the Assembly and discourse quality as part of the **Parliament Support Program (PSP)**, implemented in partnership with the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the Centre for Change Management (CCM). On 16 February 2020, the Assembly was dissolved for the early parliamentary elections, which were initially scheduled for 12 April 2020, but, due to the Covid-19 pandemic were held on the 15 July 2020. The monitoring of parliamentary debate was halted in the period February- July 2020 and therefore no report was drafted.

In this period, the monitoring focused on discussions referring to the items on the Assembly's agenda within the areas of rule of law, human rights, and democracy. In this context, the monitoring was conducted over the parliamentary working bodies and plenary sessions that have the aforementioned areas in their remit. The findings from the monitoring of the discourse quality in the Assembly are disclosed in semi-annual reports.

The Report on the discourse quality in the Assembly for the period from 4 August to 31 December 2020 is presented below.

I. Research methodology

Discourse quality in the Assembly is analyzed by using the “Discourse Quality Index”. The Index is an instrument that enables coding of each separate speech during a monitored session in compliance with several main characteristics:

- Level of speech argumentation (number of arguments in each discussion);
- Extent of respect shown by the speaker towards other Members of Parliament (MPs) and their arguments;
- Openness to acknowledge arguments of others and change personal position due to presented arguments of higher quality during the debate;
- Ability of MPs to present their views unimpededly.

New method of assessing the discourse quality has been introduced since January 2018. Semi-annual monitoring reports on the discourse quality in the Assembly also entail a **general assessment of the discourse quality according to the Discourse Quality Index (DQI)**. The scoring of the discourse quality in the Assembly is done on a scale of 1 to 10.

This Index entails the following indicators: level of argumentation (20% of the score), scope of explanation (5%), accountability (20%), strength of a better argument (20%), attitude towards participants from other parties (10%), attitude towards arguments presented by speakers from other parties (10%), attitude towards external participants (2.5%), attitude towards arguments of external participants (2.5%), interruptions (5%), and limitations (5%).

One (1), being the lowest score, means that MPs fail to use arguments and invoke any principles in their speech, twist the arguments, fail to change their position and acknowledge arguments, make no reference to the arguments of others, or change their views but not as result of arguments presented by others. Score one (1) also means that MPs show disrespect towards other participants and their arguments (either MPs or external participants), the discussion gets interrupted and speakers are physically disrupted at certain points of time. On the other hand, score ten (10), that is, excellent discourse quality, means that MPs use more than two arguments in the discussion, or minimum one argument in their address, invoke certain principles, properly address the arguments, change their views as result of better arguments, treat the personality and arguments of other discussion participants with respect (either MPs or external participants), the discussion is not interrupted and the right to speech is not limited.

See Annex 1 for more details about the assessment.

II. Political context

According to the Constitution, the Assembly holds the legislative power and is currently composed of 120 MPs. MPs are elected at direct elections by means of proportional electoral lists for a four-year term. Continuing with the informal "tradition" in the country, the incumbent Prime Minister of the SDSM-led Government, in October 2019 announced a party leaders' meeting to propose the fifth early parliamentary elections¹ in the country. The elections came as a result of the country not being able to start the accession negotiations with the European Union (EU), due to French objections to the current EU negotiating framework, and the lowered trust in the SDSM-led government, which based its platform mainly on the promise of a swift way for EU accession of the country after the name change. In February 2020, at its 137th session, the Assembly unanimously reached a decision to be dissolved, with 113 votes "for" and no votes cast against or abstentions. The following day, on 17 February, the President of the Assembly Talat Xhaferi, pursuant to the constitutional and legal powers, announced the elections² on 12 April.³ Despite the plan to hold the parliamentary elections in April, due to the worsening situation with the Coronavirus, the elections were postponed.

In March 2020, the President of the country declared a national state of emergency that lasted until 15 June. Meanwhile, the political parties met on several occasions at leadership meetings to set the date for elections, as well as to determine the

required measures for protection of citizens during the campaign and election day. After several attempts and negotiations, 15 July 2020 was set as the date of elections, along with agreement on Covid-19 protection measures for the citizens. "Citizens who receive treatment at home, who are quarantined or in isolation due to Covid-19 will vote on 13 July. Incapacitated and ill persons, and other citizens who vote one day before the Election Day, according to the Electoral Code, will vote on 14 July. Besides the additional day for voting, another novelty for the elections was that the time for voting on 15 July was extended from 19:00 to 21:00 hours."⁴ Early voting and election day itself generally proceeded in an orderly manner and without major incidents or tension.⁵

At these elections, SDSM and its coalition "Mozeme" - won 46 seats, VMRO-DPMNE and the coalition "Obnova za Makedonija", won 44 seats, whereas the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) won 15 seats. The coalition Alliance for Albanians and Alternativa won 12 seats, Levica won 2 seats, and the Democratic Party of Albanians won 1 seat. The ruling coalition was formed by SDSM's coalition "Mozeme" and DUI, after several weeks of negotiations between the political parties. The coalition ensured a majority of 61 MPs in the Assembly to form the Government, whereas the opposition was composed of VMRO-DPMNE

¹ "Zaev: We opt for early parliamentary elections", Deutsche Welle, 19 October 2019. Access on: <https://p.dw.com/p/3RYux> (last visit: 10 March 2020)

² Decision for call for early parliamentary elections in Republic of North Macedonia. Decision downloaded from the website of the State Election Commission (SEC). Access on: https://www.sec.mk/parlamentarni-izbori-2020/?_thumbnail_id=6946 (last visit: 9 March 2020)

³ Pankovski, M. and other (2020). Handbook for the parliamentary elections in Republic of North Macedonia 2020: Second amended edition. Foundation Conrad Adenauer, Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" – Skopje

⁴ Ibid

⁵ ODIHR Special election assessment mission https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/b/e/465648_2.pdf

and the coalition “Obnova za Makedonija”, coalition Alliance of Albanians and Alternativa, Levica and DPA. Eighty of a total of 120 MPs in the new parliamentary composition were newly elected, that is, took the role of parliamentarians for the first time in their career.⁶

The constitutive session of the new Assembly was held on 4 August and the Assembly resumed its regular plenary sittings from 25 August. A five-month period passed between the dissolution and the re-constituting the Assembly.

The President of the country declared a national state of emergency in March 2020, and according to the Constitution, this decision needs to be verified by the Assembly. However, the then President of the Assembly, Talat Xhaferi refused to convene a parliamentary session, stating that it would be impossible as the Assembly was already dissolved.⁷ On the other hand, 35 MPs signed and submitted an initiative for convening an urgent parliamentary session, albeit, with no success. The initiative was signed by MPs from SDSM, BESA, DPA and an independent group of MPs, while it was not supported by VMRO-DPMNE and DUI. Dissolved parliament and declared state of emergency posed an increased concern about possible deterioration of democratic processes and human rights. The situation in this period was further aggravated due to the lack of oversight by the Assembly over the Government, which was given legislative powers by being able to propose decrees with force of a law.⁸

⁶ Heislet, P.E. (2020) Lottery in the supermarket: how the political parties use the closed lists to keep the control. Lice v lice. Available at: shorturl.at/nAHIT.

⁷ “Dhaferi: I do not have a mandate to annul the decision to dissolve the parliament with an individual act. Access on: <https://360stepeni.mk/>, (last visit: 11 June 2020)..

⁸ Recica V. (2020) What is the general perception of citizens about the Assembly of Republic of North Macedonia? Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis” – Skopje <https://bit.ly/3iOBtMt>

III. Summary

The monitoring report reaffirms the two-year trend of low discourse quality in the Assembly, and the conclusion that there is a lot of space for improvement. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest, and 10 the highest), the average score for discourse quality in the Assembly is 5.5, which is lower compared to previous monitoring periods.

Opposition MPs were more actively engaged in discussion, taking part in 61% of the monitored discussions, while the MPs from the parliamentary majority took part in 39% of the discussions. Bojan Stojanovski took the floor most often and stayed longest on the speaker platform. Three female MPs, Gordana Siljanovska Davkova, Dafina Stojanovska and Zaklina Lazarevska are listed among the 10 most active MPs, which is one more female MP compared to the previous period (July – December 2020).

The report notes a similar level of interaction and exchange of views among the debate participants as in the previous monitoring period (July – December 2020). During the monitoring period, only one session for MPs' questions was held. In respect of use of arguments in a discussion, a general significant decline is noted compared to the previous period. Speakers lacked argumentation in 44% of speeches, and used poor argumentation in 45% of speeches. One or several arguments were noted only in 11% of the discussions, compared to 29% in the previous monitoring period.

The share of changed views as result of better argumentation remains significantly low in order to draw a conclusion that the MPs demonstrate openness to acknowledge better arguments presented by others. In 54% of the discussions, MPs failed to address

the strength and quality of argumentation of other speakers, whereas in 37% of the discussions the MPs kept their views and failed to recognize the valid argumentation of colleagues from other political options, which represents a 27% increase compared to the previous period (10%).

MPs increasingly focus on the personality of their interlocutors, rather than their arguments. In 16% of the speeches, MPs showed respect or partial respect for arguments presented by MPs from other political parties, and disrespect or partial disrespect towards arguments in 26% of the discussions. Respect or partial respect towards their personality was demonstrated in 32%, and disrespect or partial disrespect in 20% of the discussions.

This report also notes that MPs' addressing of the rights of marginalized groups is persistently low, in all periods of monitoring. It is noted that in over 93% of the discussions, MPs fail to address the rights of marginalized groups, unless the discussion refers to a specific law or topic on the agenda which is related to their rights. Similarly to the previous period (July – December 2019), no marginalized group is represented by more than 3% in the discussions.

IV. Findings from the monitoring

■ Discourse quality score

In the respective period, on a scale of 1 to 10, the discourse quality score is 5,5 – which is indicative of lowered discourse quality compared to the period July – December 2019, when discourse quality score was 6,0. Thus far, the score of the discourse quality in the Assembly during the respective monitoring period is the lowest, compared to previous monitoring periods in 2018 and 2019. **Unlike previous periods, discourse quality in the Assembly has not reached the minimal required score to be called a debate.** The level of explanation,

accountability and power of good argumentation are largely conducive to the discourse quality score.

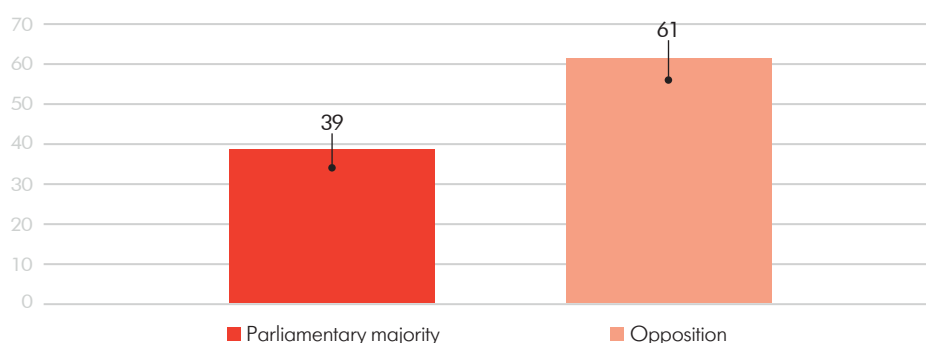
Throughout the monitoring period, one can note less accountability shown on the part of the MPs, as well as lowered extent of explanations and power of good argumentation. This is then reflected on the overall score of the discourse quality. **Generally, discourse quality is at low level similarly to the previous period, meaning a lot remains to be improved.**

■ Type of discussions

During the period of monitoring (August- December 2020), 64% of the monitored discussions were part of plenary sittings and 36% committee sittings⁹, out of total of 1605 monitored discussions (of MPs and external debate participants). 47% of the discussions referred to amendments to a law, while 24% to draft laws. 23% of the discussions referred to other acts,

while 3% to parliamentary questions and oversight hearings equally. In 84% of the discussions, the proposed legislation comes from the government, while the MPs appear as proposers in only 16% of the monitored discussions. In 11% of the discussions, the legislation discussed was submitted to the Parliament by shortened procedure. According to

Graph 1. Political affiliation of MPs (%)

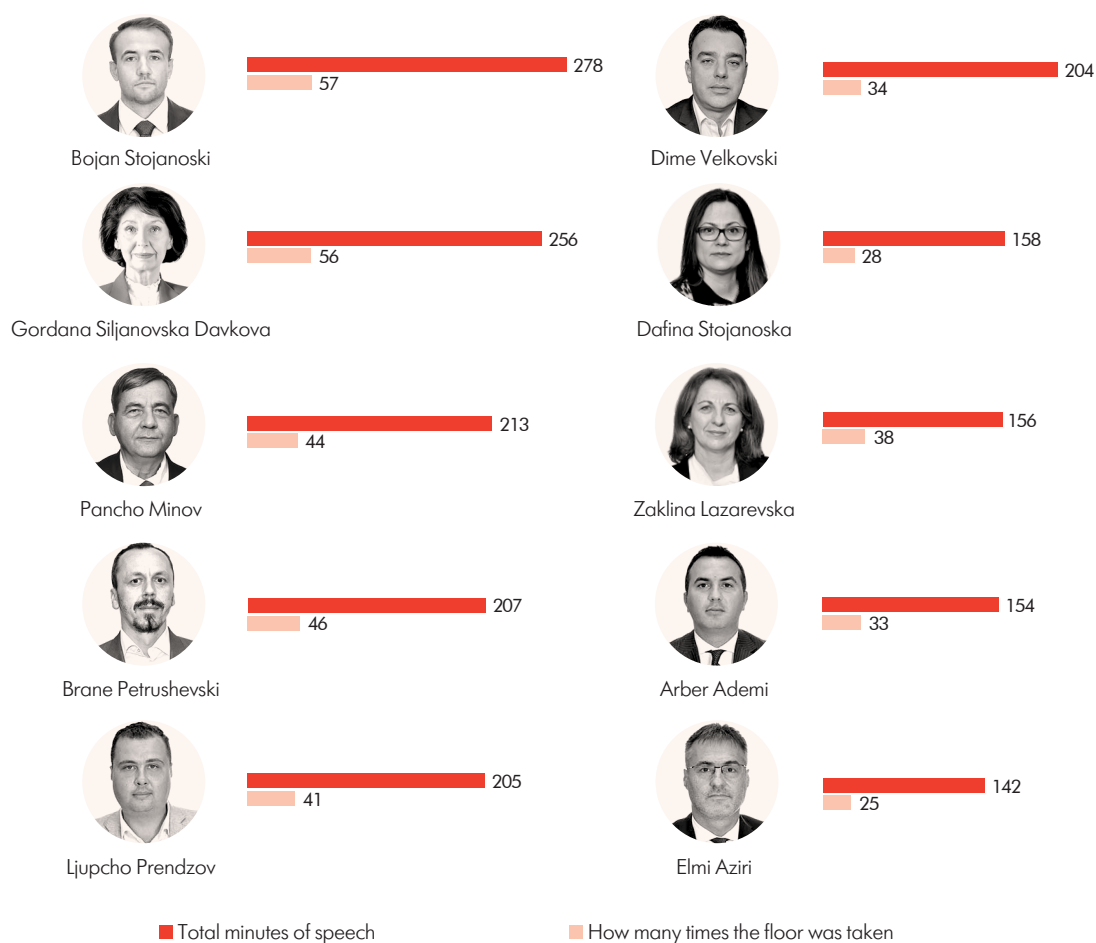


⁹ Legislative committee, Committee on political system and inter-community relations, Finance and budget committee, Budget Council of the Assembly of RM, Committee on constitutional affairs, Committee on economic affairs, Committee on culture, Committee on education, science and sport, Committee on labor and social policy, Committee on equal opportunities of women and men and Committee on transport and communications, environment

the monitoring, most discussions were held about the 2021 Budget of the Republic of North Macedonia as well as the amendments to the budget, the proposal for appointment of deputy ministers of the Government of Republic of North Macedonia and for election of a constitutional judge. The monitoring in this period reveals that based on the political affiliation of the speakers, MPs of the parliamentary majority

comprised of SDSM and coalition and DUI took part in 39% of the monitored discussions; whereas the opposition comprised of VMRO-DPMNE and the coalition, the coalition Alliance for Albanians and Alternativa, Levica and DPA took part in 61% of the monitored discussions.

Graph 2. Who were the most active MPs?



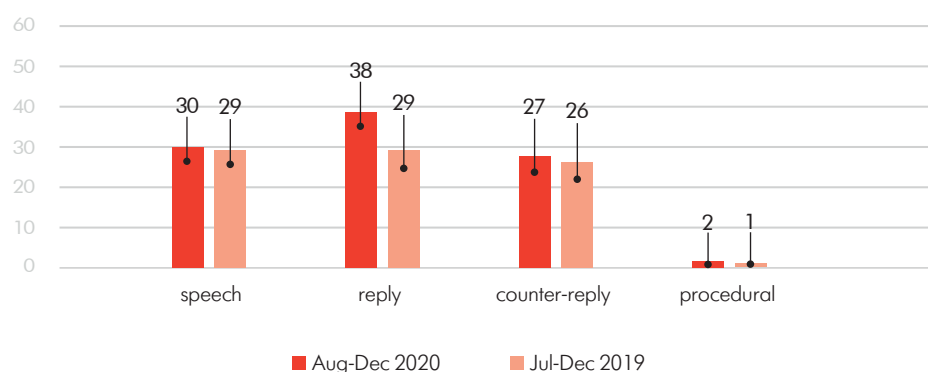
MPs who were most actively engaged and stayed longest on the speakers' platform were Bojan Stojanoski - 278 minutes, Gordana Siljanovska Davkova - 256 minutes and Pancho Minov - 213 minutes. In terms of how many times they applied to take the floor, most active MP was Bojan Stojanoski who took the floor 57 times, **Gordana**

Siljanovska Davkova – 56 times and Brane Petrushevski - 46 times. Most active female MPs during the monitoring period were the opposition MPs, Gordana Siljanovska Davkova – who stayed 256 minutes on the speaker platform and Dafina Stojanoska - 158 minutes.

By type of discussion, replies were most represented (38%), 30% were speeches and 27% counter-replies. This is indicative of a relatively satisfactory level of interaction among MPs. MPs

utilized the right to procedural remarks 32 times in order to express their views and opinions, which is 10 more procedural remarks compared to the previous year.

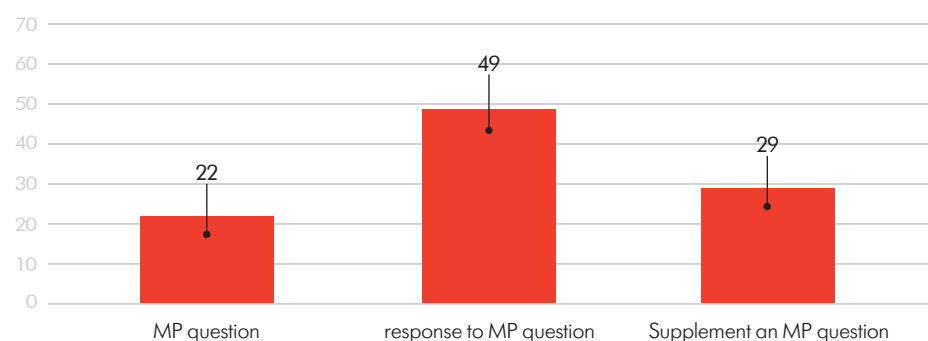
Graph 3. Type of discussions (%)



According to the Rules of Procedure, the legislature holds a session for MPs' questions to the members of the government every last Thursday of the month.¹¹ During the monitoring period, August-December 2020, only one session for MPs questions was held on the 30th December 2020. MPs questions are a key oversight tool for the work of the Government, as well as for holding the government accountable. Therefore, it is crucial

that the Assembly consistently organizes sessions for MPs' question. At the session there were 9 MPs questions and 12 additional MPs questions, or that is 51% of the discussion, whereas the remaining part of the discussion focused on the answers to MPs' questions (49%) by representatives of the Government. The parliamentary majority asked 3 questions, and the other 18 questions were asked by the opposition.

Graph 3.1 MPs questions- a rarity (%)

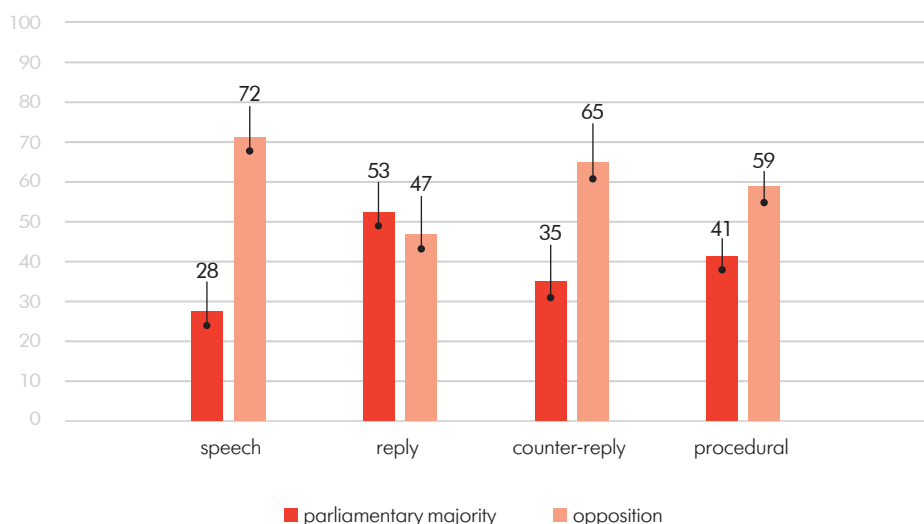


¹⁰ Rules of Procedure of the Assembly of Republic of North Macedonia <https://www.sobranie.mk/content/Delovnik%20na%20RM/DelovniknaSRMPrecistentekstAvgust13.pdf>

In terms of the type of discussion by the political affiliation of the speakers, one can note that discussion was mainly initiated by the opposition through their speeches (72%), whereas most of the

replies were given by the parliamentary majority (53%). Most of the counter-replies belong to the opposition (65%). Also, the opposition made the biggest number of procedural remarks- 59%.

Graph 4. Type of discussion by political affiliation (%)

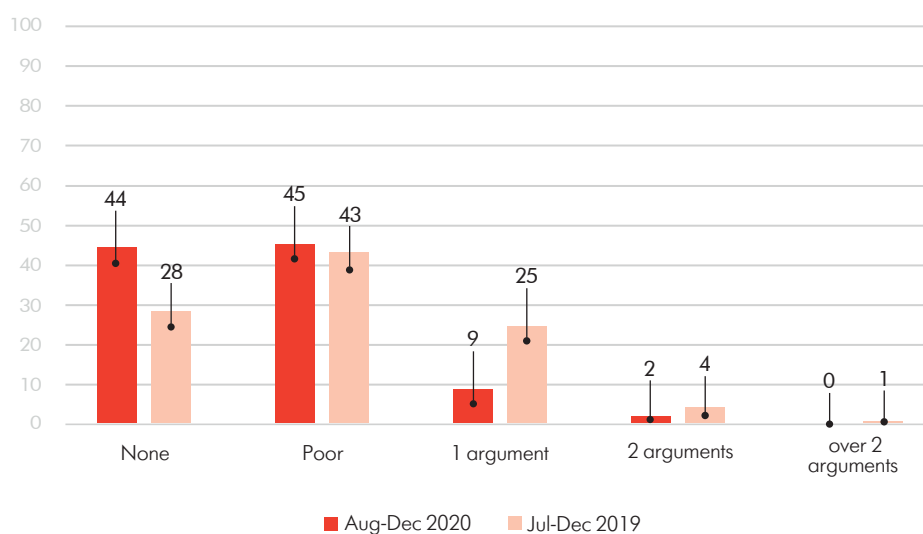


■ Level of argumentation

Participants in 44% of the analyzed discussions presented no argumentation, whereas in 45% of the analyzed discussions they presented poor arguments, that is, provided rationale for their position which does not suffice to be considered as argument. Participants used only one argument to explain their position in 9% of the discussions. Two arguments were used in 2% of the discussions, and during the monitored discussions the speakers did not use more than two arguments to support their

position. Compared to the previous term in the period from July to December 2019, one can note a significant decline in the level of argumentation. The speakers' failure to use arguments in their speeches is higher for 16 percentage points and their poor argumentation is higher for 2 percentage points. Less use of one argument accounts for 16%, and less use of two arguments accounts for 2%, which is indicative of a significant decline in the level of argumentation.

Graph 5. Level of argumentation in discussions (%)



If analyzed by the political affiliation of the speakers, 43% of discussions led by the parliamentary majority were poorly supported by arguments, and in 50% of the discussion no rationale could be identified with regard to the topic of discussion at the session. One argument was identified in only 4% of the discussions by the parliamentary majority, two arguments in 2% of the discussions, and use of more than two arguments was not noticed. In comparison with the argumentation used in discussions in the previous monitoring period, the level of argumentation of the parliamentary majority has declined in all aspects. That is, unlike the period from July to December 2019, lack of argumentation in the discussions of the parliamentary majority increased for 19%. Also, during the past reporting period, one argument was identified in 23% of the discussions, or 19% percentage points higher compared to this reporting period. Further, 4%

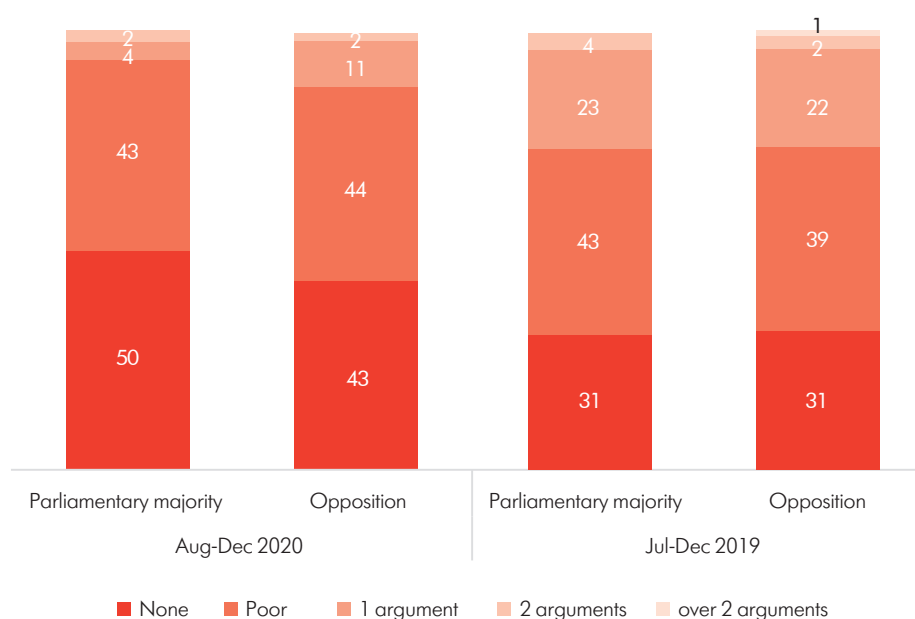
of the parliamentary majority MPs used two arguments in their discussions, or an increase of 2 percentage points compared to this period.

In respect of the opposition MPs' discussions in the period from August to December 2020, 44% of the discussions were with poor argumentation, and arguments were not used at all in 43% of their discussions. Compared to the past period, one can note an increase of 12 percentage points in terms of the number of opposition discussions without arguments (July – December 2019, 31%). Opposition MPs used one argument in 22% of the discussions, which is 11% more than the current period, whereas they used two arguments in 3% of their discussions, which is relatively compliant with the report from the previous reporting period.

The opposition demonstrated a higher level of argumentation during the reporting period.¹¹

¹¹ Given the relatively unchanged structure of the parliamentary majority and opposition, the report makes comparison with the parliamentary majority and opposition of the previous term.

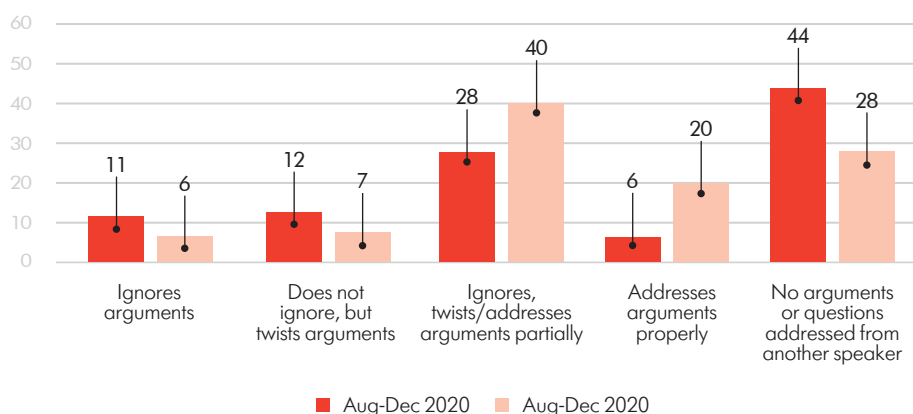
Graph 6. Level of argumentation of discussions by political affiliation (%)



In terms of MPs response to referred arguments by other speakers, unlike the previous period (July- December 2019) when arguments were properly addressed in 20% of the discussions, in this period arguments were properly addressed by MPs only in 6% of the discussions, or the MP provided direct response to arguments previously presented by another participant in the session. Unlike the previous period (July-December 2019), when participants partially responded to presented arguments in 40% of the discussion and also partially twisted or ignored the arguments, this

was the case in 28% of the discussions in the current reporting period. Arguments were completely twisted in 12% of the cases, which is an increase of 5 percentage points compared to the previous period. Arguments of other speakers were completely ignored in 11% of the cases, which is also an increase of 5 percentage points compared to the previous monitoring period. No arguments or questions were referred by other MPs in 44% of the cases, which is indicative of generally low level of discussion.

Graph 7. Accountability (%)



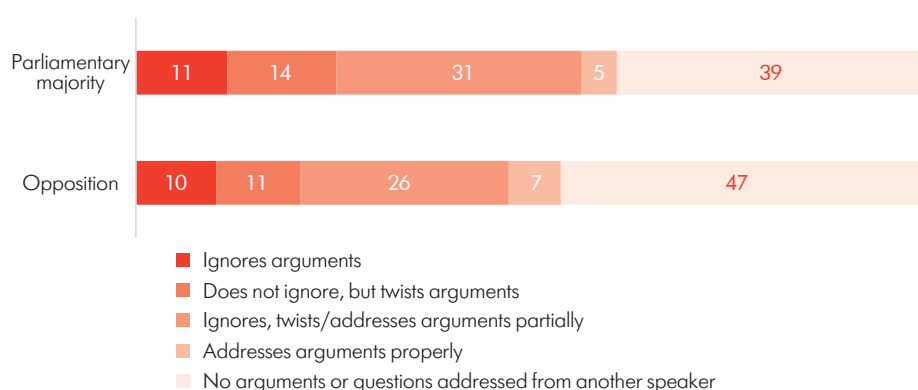
Analyzed by the political affiliation of the speakers, parliamentary majority MPs properly addressed the arguments in 5% of the discussion. Similarly, this is noted in 7% of the opposition MPs discussion.

Opposition MPs decided to partially respond to referred arguments, and to partially twist or ignore them in 26% of their discussions, and parliamentary majority MPs did so in 31% of the discussions. Parliamentary majority MPs did not ignore, but twisted the arguments in 14% of the discussion,

whereas the opposition did so in 11% of the discussion. The parliamentary majority ignored the arguments of other participants in 11% of the discussion, and the opposition ignored the arguments of others in 10% of their discussions.

In 39% of the parliamentary majority MPs discussions and in 47% of the opposition MPs discussions no arguments or questions were referred to other speakers, which may be responded or addressed.

Graph 8. Accountability by political affiliation (%)

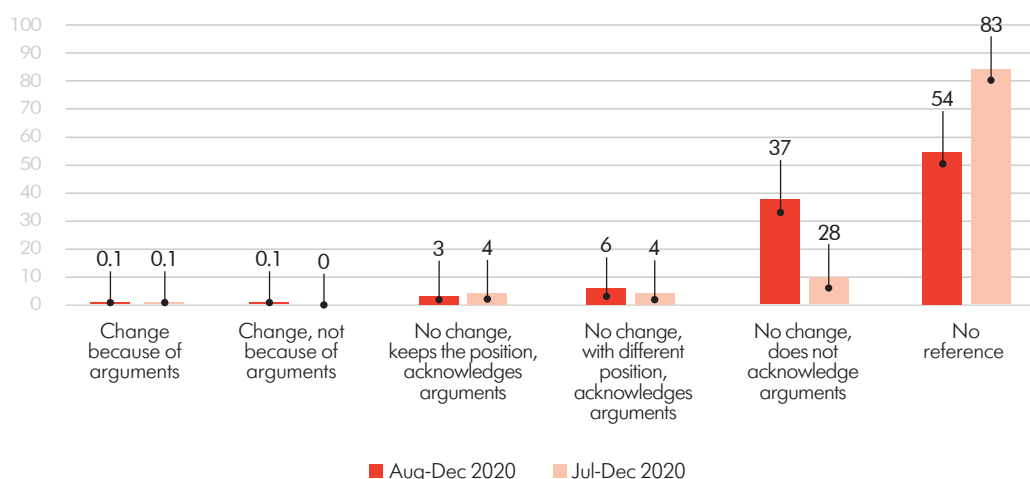


■ Power of better argument

Throughout the reporting period, change of position due to better arguments was noted in 1 case, and change of position or views but not because of better arguments was noticed in 2 cases, and only among MPs, unlike the previous period when change of position due to better arguments was noticed in 2 cases, and only among external participants. However, the number remains significantly low to be able to draw a conclusion that MPs demonstrate their openness to acknowledge proper arguments from another side. No reference was made about the quality of arguments of other speakers in 54% of the discussions, which is 29% lower compared to

the previous period. Speakers did not change their position in 3% of the discussions because MPs shared the same position and acknowledged the value of arguments presented by their fellow party members. In 6% of the discussions, MPs of various political option did not change their positions, but acknowledged the value of arguments presented by their interlocutors from other political parties. In comparison with the past period (Jul-Dec 2019), the number of discussions when MPs kept their position and did not acknowledge the value of arguments presented by other political options is 27% higher, which is indicative of lowered level of debate compared to the previous period.

Graph 9. Power of better argument (%)



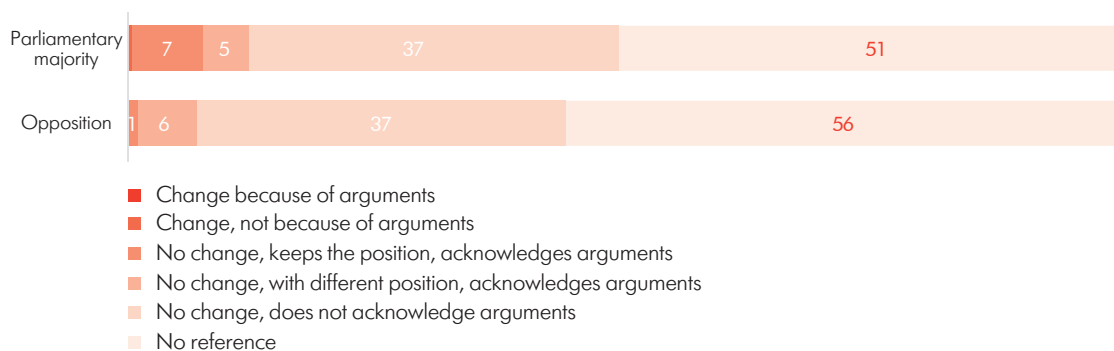
If one analyses the openness of the speakers to the arguments presented by other participants in the sessions by their political affiliation, it can be concluded that both sides focused more on presenting their positions. In 51% of the parliamentary majority discussions and 56% of the opposition discussions, MPs did not address the arguments of others. Compared to the previous period (July- December 2019), a 30% decline is noted both for the parliamentary majority and the opposition on the account of not not recognizing the arguments of others.

Change of views and acknowledging the value of arguments presented by the speakers from

the other option was not present in 37% of the parliamentary majority discussions, similarly to the opposition discussions (37%). In 5% of the discussions, even though the parliamentary majority did not change views and kept the same position, they still recognized the value of arguments presented by others. The opposition acted similarly in 6% of their discussions.

Parliamentary majority speakers changed their views as result of better arguments of their interlocutors only in one case, and the same was done by the opposition speakers. Opposition speakers also changed their position for one item of the agenda, however, not as result of better arguments of the others.

Graph 10. Power of better argument by political affiliation (%)



■ *Review and adoption of reports from independent and regulatory bodies*

Independent and regulatory bodies submitted 9 reports to the Assembly of RN Macedonia in the period from August to December 2020; however, no discussions were held either at plenary nor committee sessions. It is of utmost importance that the Assembly reviews

the submitted reports to ensure increased transparency in the work of the independent agencies or regulatory bodies. Even though they submitted their annual reports to the Assembly, citizens still had no insight into the work of independent and regulatory bodies.

Table 1.

Reports from independent and regulatory bodies	
1	2019 Annual report on the work of the State commission for second-instance decision making in the area of inspective oversight and misdemeanor proceedings.
2	2019 Annual report on the work of State commission for decision-making in administrative procedure and labor relations in second-instance.
3	2019 Annual report of the Agency for protection of the right to free access to information of public character.
4	2019 Annual report on the work of the Commission for protection of competition
5	2019 Annual report on the work of Inspection council
6	2019 Annual report on the work of Commission for securities of the Republic of North Macedonia
7	2019 Annual report on the work of the Agency for insurance supervision
8	2019 Annual report of the Agency for insurance supervision on the state and movement of the insurance market in Macedonia
9	2019 Annual report on the work of Agency for postal services

V. Respect, interruptions and limitations

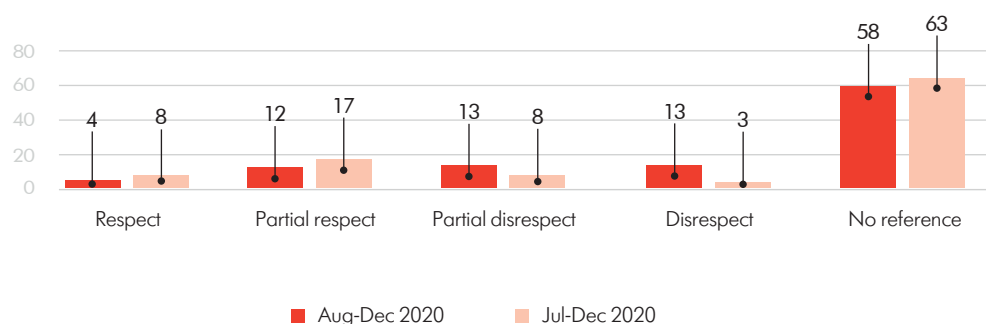
■ *Attitude towards the arguments and personality of MPs from another political party*

Various forms of disrespect towards speakers and their arguments can inflict changes in an orderly atmosphere, given that it is the main prerequisite for having a rational and well-argued debate. At the same time, it can also shift the course of discussion and divert the MPs focus to attacks and insults, which additionally creates a polarized setting and prevents any substantive discussion.

During this period, only in 4% of the cases one can note respect for presented arguments, and partial respect in 12% of the discussions. Partial disrespect was demonstrated in 13% of the discussions, which is an increase of 5 percentage

points compared to the previous monitoring period. Disrespect for arguments presented by others was shown in 13% of the cases, which is a 10% increase compared to the period July-December 2019). On the other hand, there is decline of 4 percentage points regarding the shown respect, and decline of 5 percentage points for partial respect. Unlike the previous period (July – December 2019) when MPs made no reference to the arguments of the others in 63% of the discussion, one can note a decline in this number during the monitoring period, i.e. MPs made no reference to the arguments of the others in 58% of the discussion.

Graph 11. Attitudes towards arguments of MPs from other political party (%)



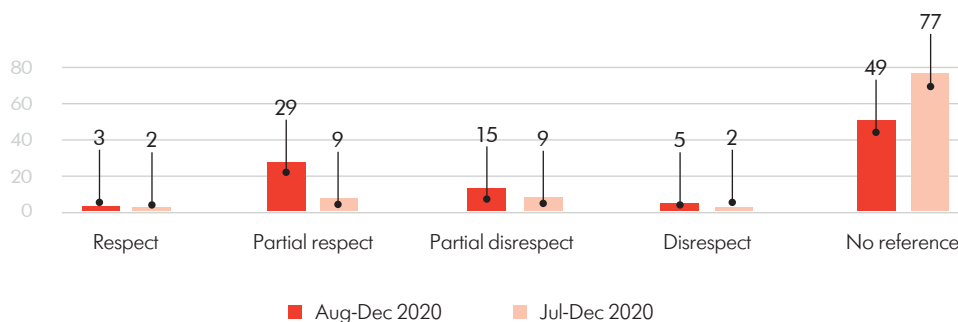
Speaking of the attitude of MPs towards the personality of the others, respect was shown in 3% of the discussions and partial disrespect in 29% of the discussions, which is a 20% increase compared to the previous monitoring period. That is, MPs did not refrain from inserting expressions of contempt

or mild insults and attacks for the personality of their colleagues from opposing political options. Disrespect was noted in 5% of the discussions, and partial disrespect in 15% of the discussions. Compared to the previous period (July-December 2019), there is an increase in the extent of showing

disrespect or partial disrespect for the personality of MPs from other political parties, that is, 6 and 3 percentage points, respectively. In such cases, speakers expressed complete disrespect for the personality of other MPs in their discussions, using offensive remarks. Unlike the previous period (July-December 2019) when MPs failed to demonstrate

any attitude towards the personality of other speakers in 77% of the discussions, in this period, MPs did not demonstrate any attitude towards the personality of other speakers only in 49% of the cases, meaning that MPs opted to address the personality of other speakers with partial respect or disrespect to a larger extent.

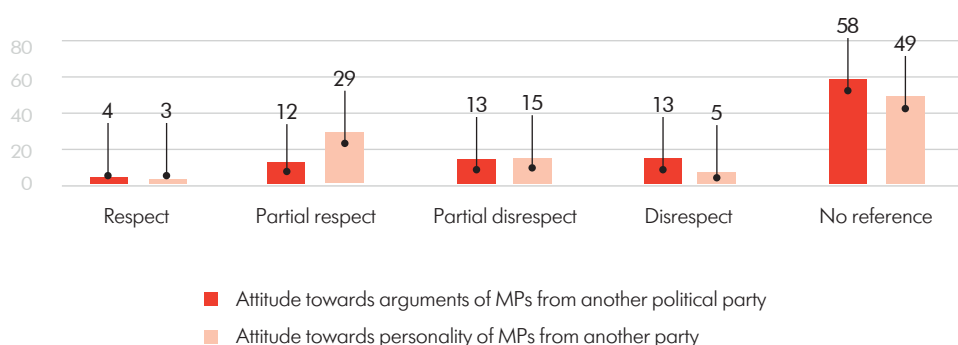
Graph 12. Attitude towards personality of MPs from another party (%)



In the period from August - December 2020, MPs focused more on the personality of the interlocutors, rather than the presented arguments, compared to the previous period (July – December 2019), when it was the opposite situation. They failed to demonstrate any attitude towards the arguments presented by others in

58% of their discussions, and no attitude towards the personality of other speakers in 49% of the discussion. Such attitude is an indicator that during the reporting period MPs focused more on the personal characteristics of interlocutors, rather than showing substantive consideration of their arguments.

Graph 13. Attitude towards arguments and personality of MPs from another party (%)

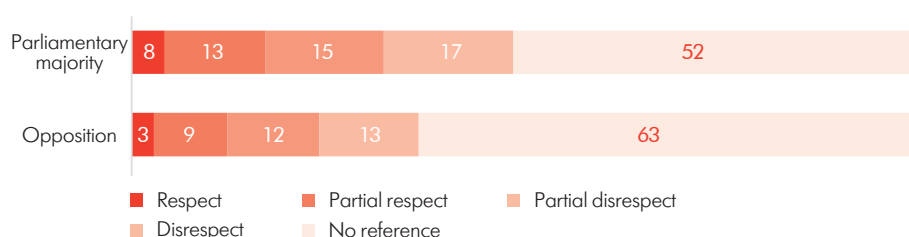


■ Attitude towards argumentation and personality by political affiliation of MPs

MPs of the parliamentary majority made no reference in 52% of their discussions, and in 17% of the cases one could note showing partial respect or respect. In 32% of the discussions, there was partial disrespect or disrespect for the arguments of the opposition. Opposition MPs in 63% of their speeches made no reference, that

is, had no attitude of respect or disrespect of the arguments presented by MPs of the parliamentary majority. They demonstrated partial disrespect or disrespect for the parliamentary majority arguments in 25% of their discussions, and partial respect or respect in 12% of their discussions.

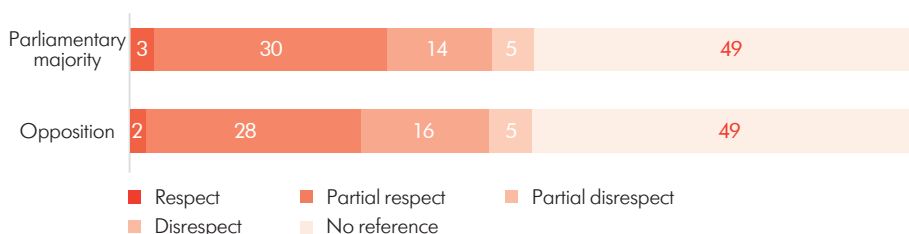
Graph 14. Attitude towards arguments of others by political affiliation (%)



In respect of the personality of other MPs, respect was demonstrated in 3% of the parliamentary majority speeches, partial respect in 30%, partial disrespect in 14% and disrespect in 5% of their speeches. 49% of the parliamentary majority MPs discussions made no reference to the personality of other MPs. Opposition MPs demonstrated respect in 2% of their speeches, partial respect in 28% of the analyzed discussions, partial disrespect in 16% and

complete disrespect in 5% of their discussions. They made no reference to the personality of MPs from other political parties in 49% of their discussions. Compared to the previous period (July- December 2019), there is a 25% decline in the number of speeches, both of the parliamentary majority and opposition, when no reference was made to the personality of the other, in favor of partial respect for the personality of other speakers.

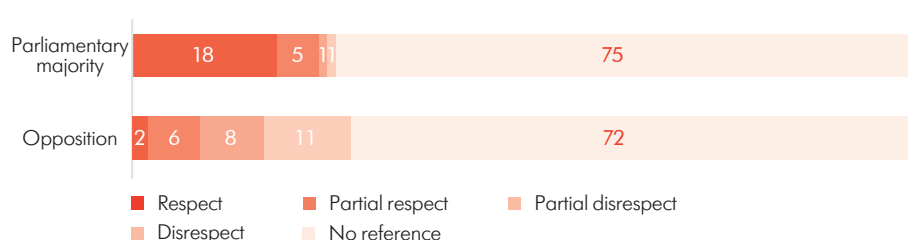
Graph 15. Attitude towards the personality of others by political affiliation (%)



During the reporting period, parliamentary majority MPs demonstrated respect for arguments presented by external participants¹² in 18% of their discussions, and partial respect in 5% of their discussions. Partial disrespect and disrespect was demonstrated in 2% of the discussions, and in 75% of the discussions they made no reference to the arguments presented by external participants. Unlike the parliamentary majority, the opposition

showed respect to the arguments of external participants only in 2% of the discussions, and partial respect in 6% of their discussions. Partial disrespect was shown in 8% of the discussion, and disrespect for the arguments presented by external participants in 11% of the discussion. Opposition MPs made no reference to the arguments of external participants in 72% of their discussion.

Graph 16. Attitude towards arguments of external participants (%)

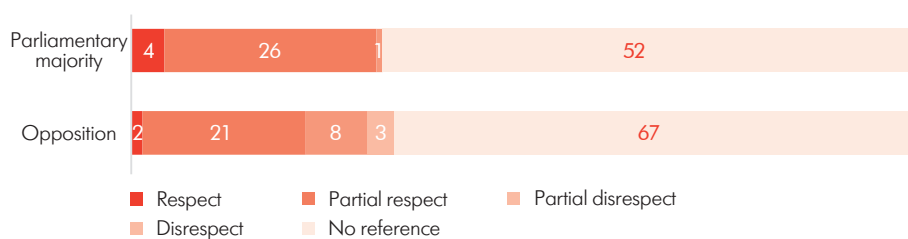


In respect of the MPs attitude towards the personality of external participants, parliamentary majority MPs showed respect in 4% of their discussion and partial respect in 26% of their discussions. Explicit respect was demonstrated only in one case. Partial disrespect was demonstrated in 1% of the discussions, and no reference was made in 68% of the discussion. Opposition MPs explicitly demonstrated respect only in one discussion, and respect for external participants in the discussion only in 2% of their speeches. In 21% of the discussion they

demonstrated partial respect – meaning that MPs did not refrain from inserting expressions of contempt or mild insults and attacks for the personality of the external participants in the discussion. Partial disrespect was noted in 8% of the discussions, and in 3% of their discussion they demonstrated disrespect – in these cases the speakers demonstrated complete disrespect for the personality of external participants- using offensive remarks. Opposition MPs showed no attitude towards the personality of external participants in 67% of their discussions.

¹² External participants are all participants in the discussions in the Assembly of RM who are not MPs.

Graph 17. Attitude towards personality of external participants (%)



During this and previous reporting periods, MPs rarely used stories, anecdotal details or testimonies in their discussion. Such elements were noted only in 1% of all discussions.

No interruption of the speech of other MPs was noted during the discussions. Interruptions lasted

for a maximum 10 seconds, mainly caused by interjections by MPs who did not get to the floor. Limitation was noted in 1% of the discussion, when MPs indicate of being obstructed or there is passive obstruction. Discussions were generally held in an undisturbed and orderly atmosphere.

VI. Marginalized groups in the Assembly

Within the monitoring of the discourse quality in the Assembly, the analysis also includes the marginalized groups and to what extent MPs in their speeches make reference to their needs and rights. In the period August- December 2020, MPs in 93,1% of their speeches failed to refer to the rights and needs of marginalized groups. One can notice that MPs fail to address the rights and needs of marginalized groups in their speeches, unless the discussion refers to

a specific law or topic on the agenda in relation to their rights. One has to be aware that a big number of laws have various impacts on various groups of citizens, therefore, all aspects need to be considered. During the reporting period, monitored discussions mostly made reference, although to a small percent, to young people (2,7%), whereas least mentioned were elderly people, single parents and LGBTI community.

Table 2. Representations of marginalised groups (%)

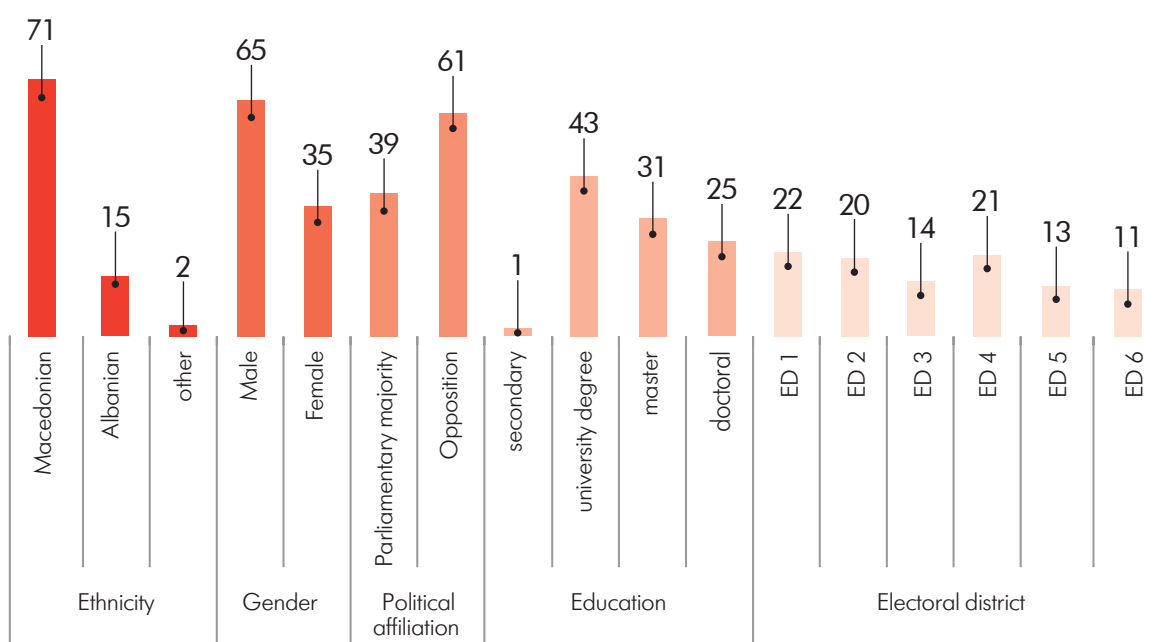
Marginalized groups	Speeches (%)	Speeches (number)
People with disabilities	1.2	20
Social welfare beneficiaries	0.3	5
Unemployed people	0.1	2
Elderly people	0	0
Roma	0.4	6
Single parents	0	0
LGBTI	0.1	1
Women	1.5	24
Citizens in rural areas	0.9	15
Young people	2.7	43
Other	0.4	7
None	93.1	1494

VII. Demographic data about the speakers

During the monitoring period, one can note that women's participation in the discussions accounts for 35%, which is a decline of 3 percentage points compared to the previous period. Also, there is a noted decline in the share of MPs with university degrees, in favor of MPs with completed master and

doctoral studies. On the other hand, there is an increase in the participation of ethnic Albanian MPs in the discussion and unlike the period from July-December 2019 when their participation accounted for 7%, their participation in the respective period accounts for 15%.

Graph 19. Demographic structure of speakers (%)



VIII. Annex 1 – Discourse Quality Index

Index of Discourse Quality is a composite index. It is composed of several indicators, deriving from the monitoring of debates. The Index is

generated through several phases, and the last phase is a sum of all weighted values of individual indicators. The Index includes the following:

Table 1.

Name	Scale	Share in the final sum (%)
Level of argumentation	[-1:1]	20
Scope of argumentation	[-1:1]	5
Accountability	[-1:1]	20
Power of better argument	[-1:1]	20
Attitude towards participants from another political party	[-1:1]	10
Attitude towards arguments of participants from another political party	[-1:1]	10
Attitude towards external participants	[-1:1]	2,5
Attitude towards arguments presented by external participants	[-1:1]	2,5
Interruptions	[-1:1]	5
Limitations	[-1:1]	5

For indexing purposes, each indicator is assigned a score for individual categories.

Scoring is presented in the table below:

Table 2.

Level of argumentation	Grades	Scope of explanation	Grades
More than 2 arguments	4	Abstract principles	2
2 arguments	3	Common good	2
1 argument	2	Other groups	1
Weak	0	Own group	1
None	-2	Neutral	0

Accountability	Grades	Power of better argument	Grades
Properly addressed arguments	2	Change due to arguments	5
Partially ignores, twists, addresses the arguments	1	No change, with different position, acknowledges arguments	3
No addressed arguments or questions from another speaker	0	No change, keeps the position, acknowledges arguments	1
Ignores arguments	-1	No change, no acknowledgement of arguments	0
Does not ignore, but twists the arguments	-2	Change, not deriving from arguments	0
		No reference	0

Attitude towards participants from another political party	Grades
Explicit respect	2
Respect	2
Partial respect	1
No reference	0
Partial disrespect	-1
Disrespect	-2

Attitude towards external participants	Grades
Explicit respect	2
Respect	2
Partial respect	1
No reference	0
Partial disrespect	-1
Disrespect	-2

Attitude towards arguments presented by another political party	Grades
Explicit respect	2
Respect	2
Partial respect	1
No reference	0
Partial disrespect	-1
Disrespect	-2

Attitude towards arguments presented by external participants	Grades
Explicit respect	2
Respect	2
Partial respect	1
No reference	0
Partial disrespect	-1
Disrespect	-2

Limitations	Grades
None	0
Passive obstructions	-1
Yes, the speaker indicates the obstructions	-1
Physical interruption	-2

Interruptions	Grades
No interruptions	0
With interruptions	-1

Each of these indicators was linearly transformed into sub-indices on a scale of -1 to 1, taking into account the transformation

so that the original score did not lose the positive or negative sign. Hence, the universal transformation formula is:

$$i = \frac{2 \times \text{indicator}}{(\max - (-\max))}$$

For all indicators except for interruption and limitation, because in these two indicators the absolute value of the lowest possible grade is

greater than the value of the highest possible grade. Hence, the formula is:

$$i = \frac{2 \times \text{indicator}}{(|\min| - (-\min))}$$

Once the sub-indices of the individual indicators are calculated, for calculation we take the calculation of the pre-DQI with weighted values of the sub-indices

according to the participation given in Table 1. For easier viewing, the final DQI is transformed linearly in a scale of 1 to 10 according to the following formula:

$$DQI = \frac{(10 - 1)}{(1 - (-1)) \times (\text{preDQI} - 1)} + 10$$

These calculations and transformations are made for each speech individually and the report

transmits the arithmetic mean of all speeches from the observed period.

About the Project

The Swiss Parliamentary Support Program (PSP) supports the efforts of the Assembly of Republic of North Macedonia for independence through building consensus, structural reforms and capacity building for institutional development of the Assembly; its legislative and oversight role and institutional transparency and accountability.

PSP is implemented by the National Democratic Institute, the Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" – Skopje and the Centre for Change Management, aimed at supporting the strategic planning of the Assembly, human resources management reforms, improved regulatory impact assessment and procurement processes, commitment to open data and measuring the public opinion and monitoring of the efforts for reforms, including enhanced citizen participation in policy-making processes.

About IDSCS

IDSCS is a think-tank organization, dealing with research about good governance development, rule of law and European integration of North Macedonia. The mission of IDSCS is to support citizen participation in decision-making process and strengthen the participatory political culture. By strengthening the liberal values, IDSCS contributes to the cohabitation of diversities.

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The electronic edition is available at:

<https://idscs.org.mk/en/portfolio/parliament-watch-monitoring-report-on-the-debate-quality-in-the-parliament-august-december-2020/>



ПРОГРАМА ЗА ПАРЛАМЕНТАРНА ПОДДРШКА
PROGRAMI PËR MBËSHITETJE PARLAMENTARE
PARLIAMENT SUPPORT PROGRAMME

Monitoring report No.03/2021

-

Parliament Watch: Monitoring report on the debate quality in the Parliament (August - December 2020)

Authors: Vlora Rechica and Aleksandra Jovevska Gjorgjevikj

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February 2021