

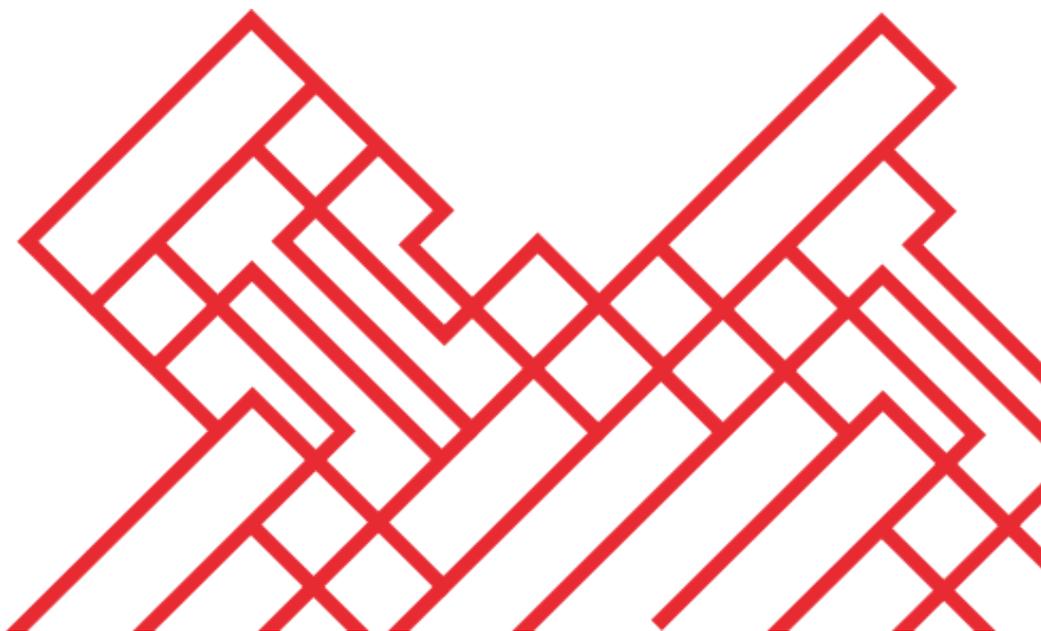
ПРОГРАМА ЗА ПАРЛАМЕНТАРНА ПОДДРШКА
PROGRAMI PËR MBËSHËTETJE PARLAMENTARE
PARLIAMENT SUPPORT PROGRAMME

Policy Brief No.18/2021

July 2020 - July 2021:
One year after the parliamentary elections,
how do the citizens perceive the political
influence and the openness of the current
composition of the Assembly?

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1. Introduction

Parliaments exist to ensure the perspective of the citizens in exercising their sovereignty and to reflect and closely monitor the work of the executive. Based on their personal judgment on the successful or unsuccessful work of the Members of the Parliament (MPs) and the executive, the citizens make the decision and cast their vote in the next parliamentary elections. The party or coalition with the largest number of seats receives the mandate to form the Government and manage the State's resources in the following period. In that regard, the citizen perceptions are powerful indicators that put additional pressure on the political institutions, as they shape the election results and lead to election or fall of governing structures. Therefore, the occasional consultation with the citizens about their perception regarding the work of the Assembly is necessary and required information for the MPs. In this way, the MPs can get a picture of the positive and negative attitudes of the public about specific areas of their work and receive valuable guidance and recommendations for future development.

The current tenth composition of the Parliament was elected in the early parliamentary elections held on 15 July 2020. In these elections, SDSM and the "We Can" coalition won 46 MP seats; VMRO-DPMNE and the Coalition "Renewal for Macedonia"

won 44 seats, the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) won 15 seats, the coalition Alliance for Albanians and Alternative won 12 seats, the Left won 2 seats, while the Democratic Party of Albanians won 1 seat. The government coalition was formed by SDSM and the "We Can" coalition, including DUI and DPA, which secured a majority in the Assembly with 62 MPs. In the elections, 80 out of a total of 120 elected MPs were new, i.e., they were elected members of the Assembly for the first time in their career.

For 13 years, the Institute for Democracy has been continuously monitoring the citizens' perception of the work of the Assembly. In the period February-March 2021, within the Parliament Support Program (PSP), an annual field survey was conducted on the work of the new parliamentary composition that was voted in, in July 2020. The purpose of this brief analysis is to provide a comparative overview of the attitudes of the citizens about the role and openness of the Assembly in the current parliamentary composition compared to the previous parliamentary compositions in the period 2016 - 2021. This document will identify several issues with potential for improvement and give recommendations on enabling that improvement.

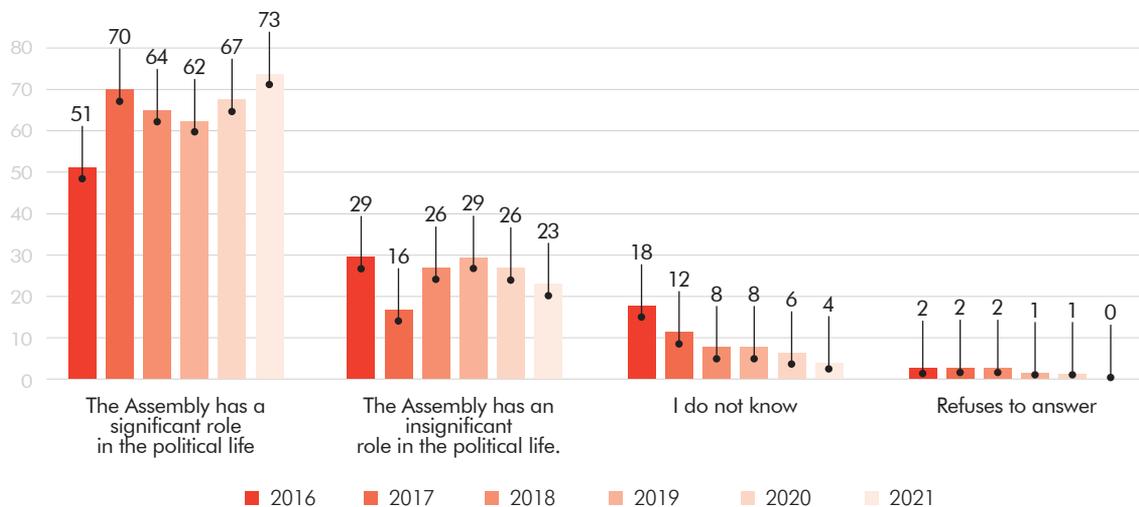
2. The role of the Assembly in the political life of North Macedonia

The Assembly, as the highest representative body through which the citizens exercise their power in a parliamentary democracy, has the broadest and most autonomous power in the country. The competencies of the legislature are original and constitutionally determined, and this arrangement in the political system of North Macedonia provides the Assembly with a significant role in creating social and economic life.

The majority of citizens recognize the vital role of the Assembly in the political life of the country. This view is confirmed in the results of the survey conducted in 2021. In the last five years, the number of citizens who believe that the Assembly has a significant role in the country's political life is

constantly around two-thirds (and more) in relation to the total number of citizens. A more detailed analysis shows that this perception among the citizens is growing in the last three years, reaching its peak in 2021, when as many as 73% of citizens said that the Assembly plays a significant role in the political life of the country. Accordingly, in the last three years, there is a constant decline in the percentage of citizens who think that the Assembly plays an insignificant role in the country's political life, reaching 23 percent in 2021 (Chart 1). This positive and growing trend in recognition of the Assembly as an important stakeholder in the country's political life is an indicator that the citizens are building the perception about the importance of separation of powers and the essential influence of the legislature on the policymaking.

Chart 1. What is the role of the Assembly in the political life in North Macedonia (%)

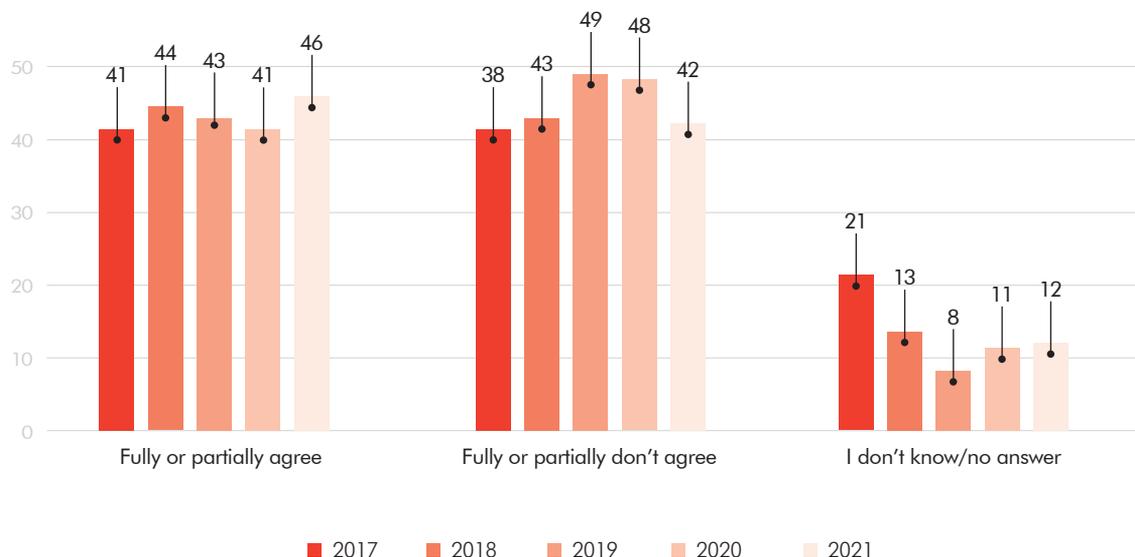


In parallel with the growing trend of recognition of the vital role, the legislature has in the political life, the percentage of citizens who believe that the Assembly is ready to implement reforms and normalize the political situation in the country is increasing. In terms of the readiness to implement the reform processes announced following the formation of the parliamentary majority and the Government in 2017, the greatest optimism among the citizens was observed in 2021.

The survey results conducted in 2021 show that the

percentage of citizens who partially or completely agree that the Assembly is ready to implement reforms is five percentage points higher than 2020 (41%), and three or two percentage points higher in 2019 and 2018, respectively. Consequently, in 2021 there has been a decline in the number of citizens who are fully or partially convinced that the Assembly is not ready to implement reforms and normalize the political situation – from 48% in 2020 and 49% in 2019, this percentage is reduced by 6 or 7 percentage points, respectively, so in 2021 it is 42% (Chart 2).

Chart 2. The Assembly is prepared to implement reforms and normalize the political situation (%)



The increase in positive perception in 2021 about the readiness of the Assembly to implement reforms indicates that the citizens recognize an increase in the possibilities for greater efficiency and effectiveness in the implementation of the legislature's functions. The financial and

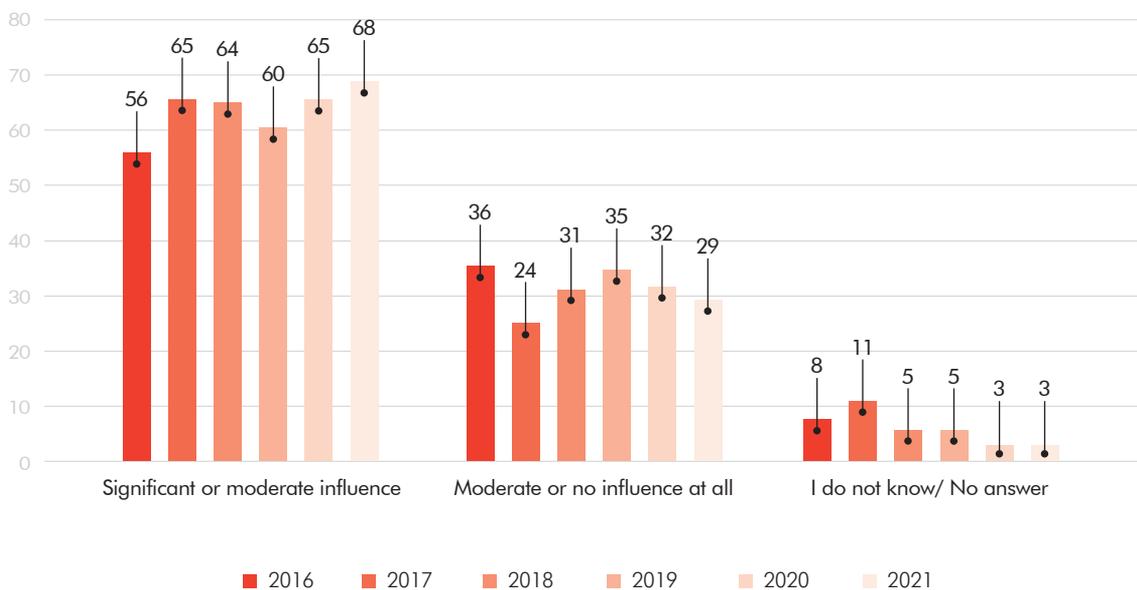
administrative independence of the parliamentary service, which was voted with a broad political consensus in January 2020, will provide additional support to the Assembly towards the implementation of its competencies and role in the political life. This positive step forward should

be maintained and developed by this composition of the Assembly to increase the confidence in the Assembly as the highest power in the country.

In these survey results, a positive change was also noted in the perception of whether the Assembly influences the quality of the laws it adopts. In 2021, more than two-thirds (68%) of the respondents stated that the Assembly has a moderate or very high influence on the quality of laws, which is the highest percentage measured in the last six years. On the other hand, accordingly, the percentage of respondents who believe that

the Assembly moderately or not at all does not affect the quality of laws in North Macedonia in 2021 is at 29%. After 2017 (24%), this is the lowest percentage (Chart 3). This growing trend indicates that an increasing number of citizens believe that the Assembly influences the normative framework through additional adaptation of the laws. The perception of the citizens on the importance of the Assembly in the legislative process depends on the constant efforts of the MPs to exercise their legislative function in the interest of citizens.

Chart 3. To what extent does the Assembly influence the quality of laws in our country? (%)



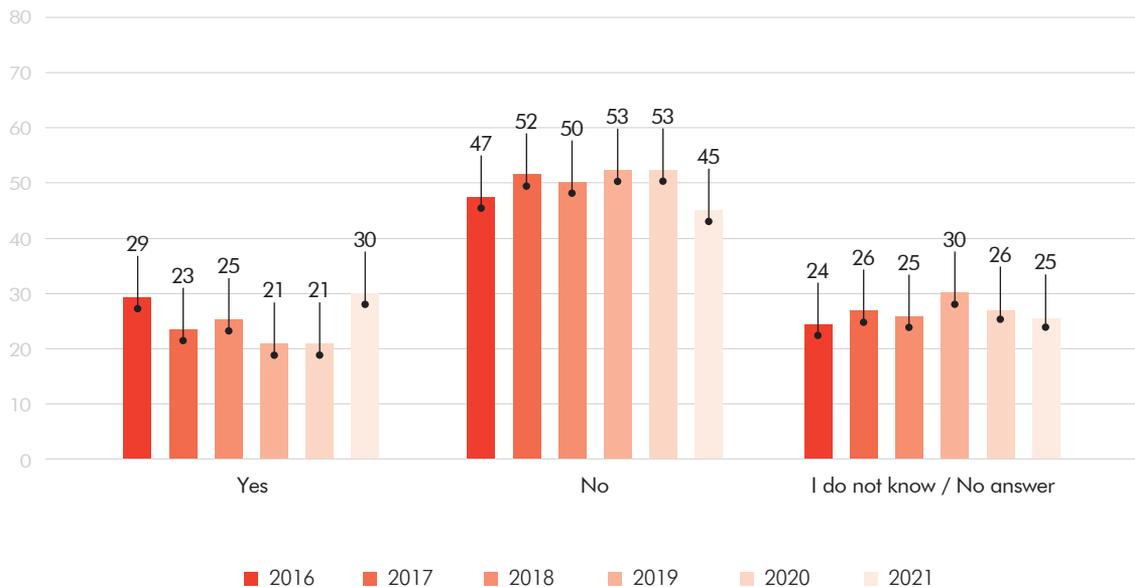
3. The openness of the Assembly

In order to implement its representative function, the Assembly must be in constant contact with the citizens. Some of these engagements include meetings and consultations, active involvement of the public in its work, and transparency and accountability to the citizens. The citizens have the right to have easy and fast access to information on the Assembly's work, be informed about the mechanisms for involvement in the work of the Assembly and be encouraged to practice them.

The results of the analysis made in 2021 indicate that, according to the public, the new parliamentary composition is the most accessible for communication with the citizens, compared to the previous ones in the last six years. Almost one-third

(30%) of the citizens think that the MPs from their constituency are available for meeting with the public. Compared to the results of the surveys conducted in 2020 and 2019, there is a significant increase in this positive perception by nine percentage points. Taking into account the last six years, the percentage of citizens who think that the elected representatives are not available for a meeting with the citizens in 2021 was the lowest, at 45%, which again is a reduction of 8 percentage points compared to 2020 and 2019 (53%; Chart 4). Although this percentage of citizens who are not convinced in the availability of MPs remains high, such a significant reduction is a positive indicator of a possible improvement of the situation in this area.

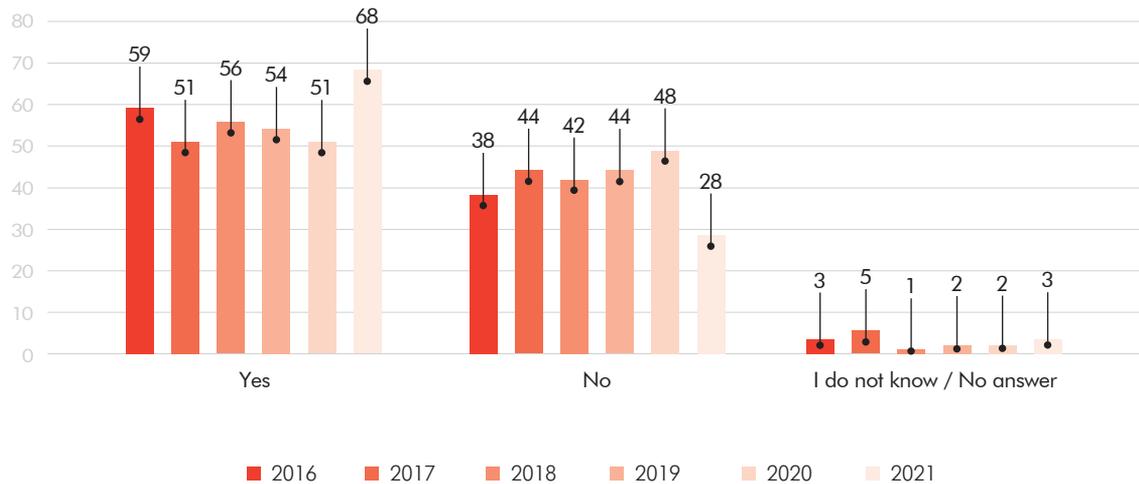
Chart 4. The MP from your region (municipality, electoral district) is available to have meetings with citizens (%)



This perception of the public is supported by the fact that in 2021 more than two-thirds (68%) of the citizens knew who the elected representatives from their constituency were. This percentage is significantly higher than any other percentage in the last six years concerning this issue, i.e., it

is higher by more than nine percentage points compared to any of the previous six years. Specifically, compared to the results from 2020 and 2019, in 2021, there was an increase of the citizens who know the MPs from their constituency of 17 and 14 percentage points, respectively (Chart 5).

Chart 5. Do you know who is the MP from your constituency? (%)



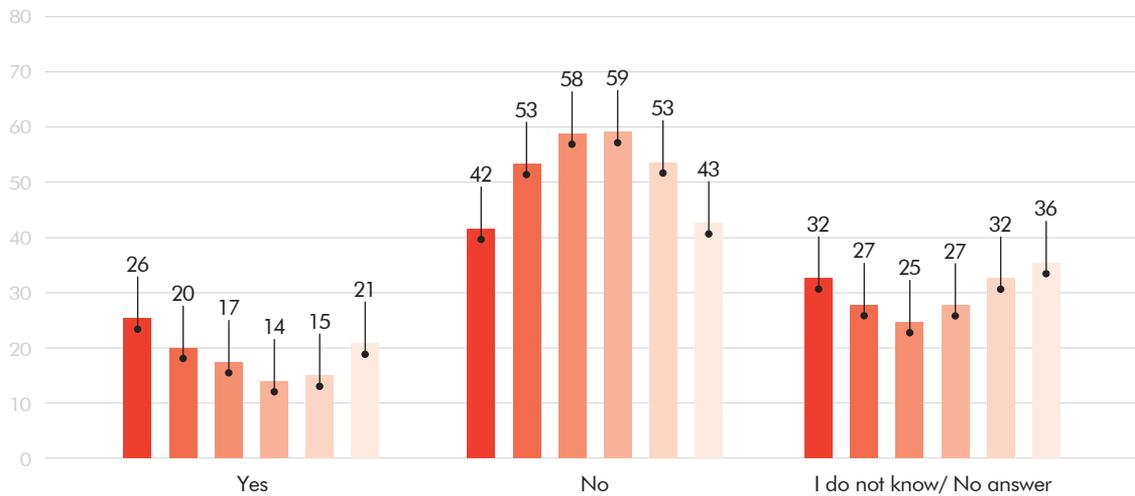
Since local issues are of direct and immediate importance for the daily life of the citizens, and that the citizens can more easily identify with them, the survey also explored the public perception of how much the MPs pay attention to local issues in the work of the Assembly. In this issue, there is a positive trend in the last three years – in 2021,

21% of respondents said that the MP from their constituency raised an issue that directly affects their municipality. Compared to 2019 (14%) and 2020 (15%), the most recent analysis from 2021 shows an increase of 7 and 6 percentage points concerning this issue, respectively. The percentage of citizens who think that the MPs do not deal with

the local problems has decreased significantly in the last three years, reaching 43% in 2021, which, in addition to the result in 2016 (42%), is the lowest in the last six years. Specifically, compared to 2019

(59%) and 2020 (53%), in 2021, there is a decline of 16 and 10 percentage points, respectively, concerning this negative perception of the citizens (Chart 6).

Chart 6. Has it ever happened that an MP from your constituency took initiative in the Assembly about a problem in your municipality? (%)



The survey results conducted in 2021, compared to the last four years, show a slight increase in the positive perception that the MPs include the remarks of the public in the adoption of laws, and there is also a corresponding reduction of the percentage of citizens who feel that this has never happened. In fact, 16% of the respondents in 2021 said that the MPs always, or often, consider the remarks of the

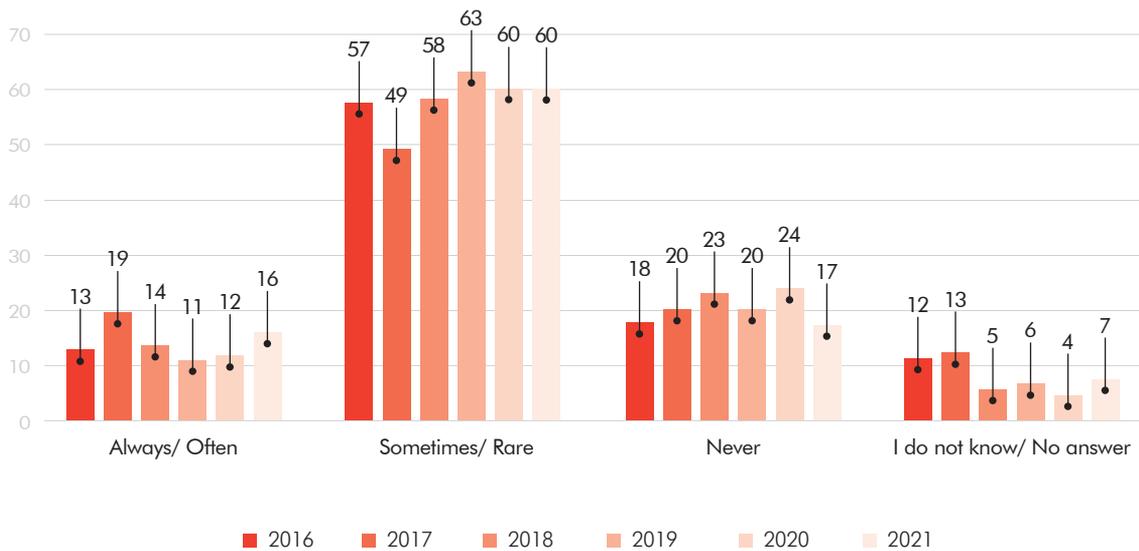
public and civil society organizations when adopting laws, which is four or five percentage points more compared to 2020 and 2019, respectively. On the other hand, almost the same percentage of respondents (17%) in 2021 stated that the MPs never take into account the opinion of citizens, which, in addition to the result from 2016 (18%), is the lowest in the last six years, and compared

to 2020 (24%) is a significant decrease of seven percentage points.

This positive step in 2021, in terms of how much the citizens think that the MPs include their remarks in the preparation of the laws, is crucial

to be retained and continuously increased in the remaining mandate of this parliamentary composition. The citizens find it necessary for their opinion to be both realistically taken into account and translated into the normative framework of the country.

Chart 7. How often do MPs include the comments made by citizens and civil society organizations in the law making (%)



4. Conclusion and recommendations

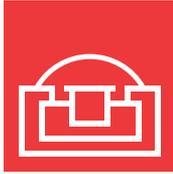
In 2021, there is a positive step forward in the citizens' attitudes regarding the role of the Assembly in the political life of the country, the availability of elected representatives to the public, and the involvement of citizens in the decision-making processes. The public recognizes this parliamentary composition as the most influential in the political life and in terms of quality of the normative framework of North Macedonia since 2016. They find that the Assembly is ready to implement reforms and normalize the political life in the country. In addition, the citizens said that the current MPs are more accessible for communication with the citizens than their colleagues from the previous mandates. They hear better the immediate local needs of the citizens and are more considerate to the remarks raised by the public.

However, these positive trends are still in their infancy, so additional efforts and will on the part of the MPs are needed in order to maintain and improve this situation. Here is some advice on how to achieve that:

- **The Assembly must make serious efforts to improve the quality of implementation of its constitutionally defined functions and, above all, the oversight function.** The MPs should actively and substantially practice the oversight mechanisms available to them. In that way, the influence and role of the Assembly in the country's political life will significantly increase.
- **Better informing and knowledge on the topics that are subject to discussion in the Assembly and improving the debating and oratory skills**

of the MPs. In this way, the MPs will be able to make more informed decisions, better explain their claims through arguments in front of their colleagues, and further influence the quality of the laws they enact. The Parliamentary Institute (PI), which operates within the Assembly, researches topics of interest to the MPs as well as education and training in specific areas. Hence, there is a need for greater and more effective use of the PI services by the MPs. Additionally, there is a need to increase the cooperation with the civil society sector, which has the expertise and know-how on specific topics, which can significantly assist the MPs in the decision-making process.

- **The Assembly should constantly upgrade the mechanisms and practices for maintaining close and direct contact with citizens.** The public should have a good and regular insight into the work of the Assembly and an open channel for two-way communication with its representatives. This can be achieved by improving the content and tools of the Assembly for informing the public (for example, the Assembly TV channel, the website of the Assembly, and the social media profiles), as well as the activation of the existing offices for contact with the citizens located in the municipalities across the country. The Assembly should also intensify the education of the citizens on the existing mechanisms for their involvement in the legislature's work.



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