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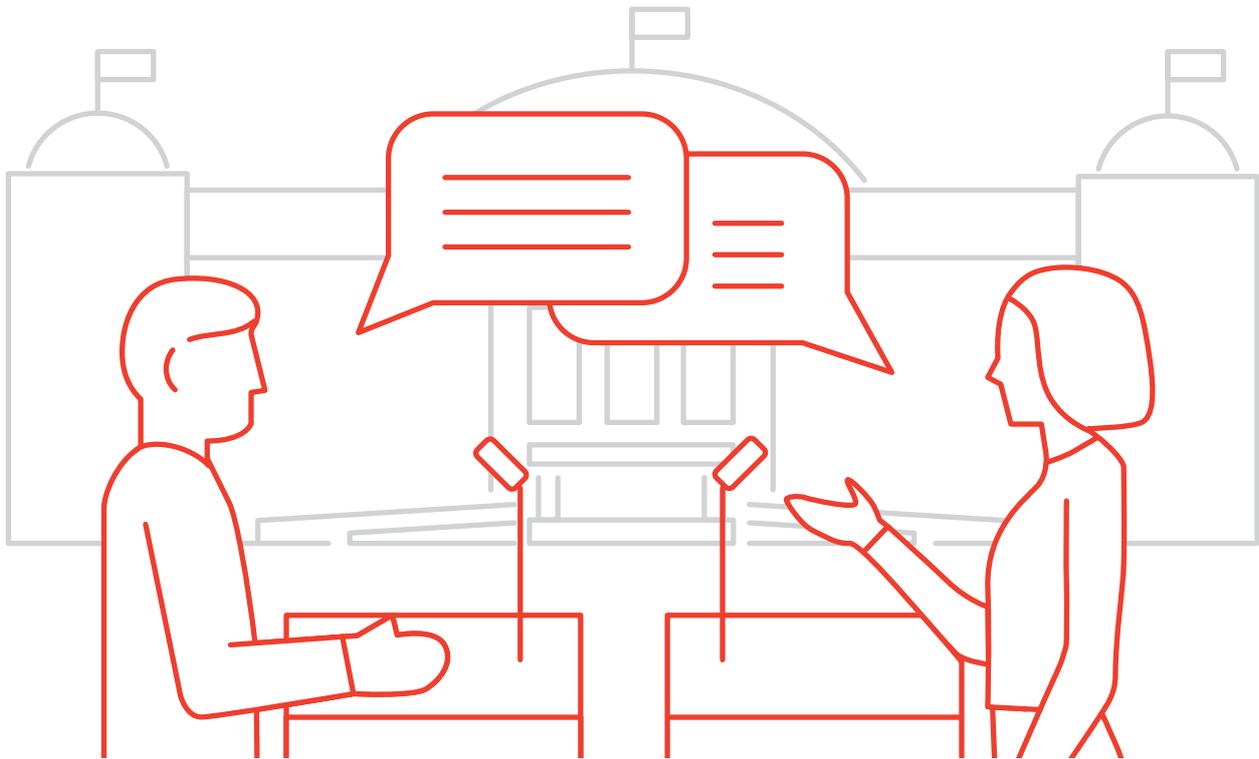
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PARLIAMENT WATCH: MONITORING REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF DEBATE IN THE ASSEMBLY (JANUARY - JUNE 2022)

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I. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The quality of the debate in the Assembly is analysed using the «Discourse Quality Index.» This Index is an instrument that enables to code of each separate speech during a monitored session by several main characteristics:

- Level of speech argumentation (number of arguments in each discussion);
- The extent of respect shown by a 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;
- The ability of MPs to present their views unimpededly.

The semi-annual reports on the quality of debate in the Assembly include a **general assessment of discourse quality in line with the Discourse Quality Index (DQI)**. The discourse quality in the Assembly is scored on a scale of 1 to 10.

This Index entails the following indicators: level of argumentation (20% of the score), the scope of explanation (5%), accountability (20%), the strength of a better argument (20%), and 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), or the lowest score, means that MPs are not using any arguments in their discussion, do not rely on certain principles, distort the arguments, do not change their position and do not accept arguments, do not refer to arguments of others or would change their position, but not because of interlocutor's arguments. A score of one (1) also means that MPs do not show respect towards other participants and their arguments (MPs or external participants), the discussion is interrupted, and the speakers are interrupted physically at a certain point. On the other hand, a score of ten (10), that is, excellent discourse quality, means that MPs use more than two arguments in their discussion, or at minimum, one argument in their address, rely on certain principles, adequately address the arguments, change their views as a 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.

More details of the assessment methodology are provided in Annex 1.

II. INTRODUCTION

In line with the Constitution, the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia has legislative power and is comprised of 120 MPs in this term. MPs are elected at direct elections through proportional electoral lists for a four-year term. Pursuing the informal custom, in October 2019, Zoran Zaev, the head of the then SDSM-led government, announced a leadership meeting at which he proposed the fifth early Parliamentary elections¹ in the country. The elections came about as a result of the inability of the country to start accession negotiations with the European Union (EU) due to the French veto and the broken trust in the SDSM-led government, whose platform was mainly based on the country's uninterrupted path towards the EU. In February 2020, at the 137th session of the Assembly, with 113 votes in favour and no votes against or abstentions, the Assembly unanimously reached a decision to be dissolved, while the next day, on February 17, the President of the Assembly, Talat Xhaferi, within his constitutional and legal competencies, set the elections² for April 12.³ Despite the plans to hold elections in April, given the deteriorating situation with the Covid-19 pandemic, elections were postponed and finally held on July 15, 2020.

At these elections, SDSM and the "Mozheme" coalition won 46 seats, VMRO-DPMNE and the "Obnova za Makedonija" coalition won 44 seats, while the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) won 15 seats. The Alliance for Albanians and Alternativa coalition won 12 seats, Levica won 2 seats, and the Democratic Party of the Albanians won 1. After several weeks of negotiations between the political parties, a government coalition was established between SDSM and the "Mozheme" coalition, DUI and DPA. With this coalition, the government secured a majority in the Parliament with 62 MPs, while the opposition was joined by VMRO-DPMNE and the "Obnova za Makedonija" coalition, the Alliance for Albanians, Alternativa and Levica. The majority in the Assembly changed in November 2021. After Zoran Zaev resigned from the position of SDSM leader and Prime Minister, BESA Movement joined the opposition in an attempt to achieve a no-confidence vote for the SDSM-led government. This attempt failed as one of the BESA Movement MPs changed his position. After weeks of negotiations, SDSM managed to form a coalition with the opposition party Alternativa, so as of December 2021, the Assembly operates with a new majority, established by SDSM and the coalition of DUI, DPA and Alternativa, with a total of 64 MPs.

Between January and June 2022, the Assembly was generally very active in sessions. During this period, the Assembly voted for a new Government, discussed the interpellation of the Assembly President Talat

1 „Zaev: We're off to quick, early elections", Deutsche Welle, October 19 2019. Accessed on: <<https://p.dw.com/p/3RYux>> (last visited on: 10 March 2020)

2 Decision for announcing early elections for MPs in the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia. The decision was downloaded from the website of the State Election Commission (SEC). Accessed at: <https://www.sec.mk/parlamentarni-izbori-2020/?_thumbnail_id=6946> (last visited on: March 9, 2020)

3 Pankovski, M. et al. (2020). 2020 Handbook on parliamentary elections in the Republic of North Macedonia: Second and updated edition. Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Institute for Democracy 'Societas Civilis' - Skopje

Xhaferi, held three parliamentary questions sessions out of six sessions that are stipulated in the Rules of Procedure, and had an extensive discussion about the changes and amendments to the 2022 national budget in May and June 2022.

In the periods between the semi-annual discourse quality reports, IDSCS published several short analyses for the Assembly based on monitoring of discourse quality in the previous periods, which are available at this [link](#). Further information on the Assembly discourse quality between July-December 2021 is available at the following link [“Parliamentary Watch: Monitoring Report on Discourse Quality in the Assembly \(July-December\).”](#)

In the period between January-June 2022, the monitoring was focused on discussions on points on the Assembly's agenda in the areas of the rule of law, human rights and democracy. In this context, IDSCS monitored the working bodies and plenary sessions of the Assembly, which encompass these areas. You are now reading the report for the discourse quality in the Assembly, which refers to the period from January - June 2022.

III. SUMMARY

The report points to a relatively low discourse quality in the Assembly in the last two years and supports the conclusion that there is room for significant improvement. **On a scale of 1 - lowest to 10 - highest, the mean score of the discourse quality in Assembly in the first half of 2022 is 5,5.**

The opposition MPs were more actively engaged in the discussions and participated in 64% of the discussions under observation, while the parliament majority MPs participated in 36% of them. MPs Bojan Stojanoski and Gordana Siljanovska Davkova were the ones who took the floor most often and who had the longest speeches. Among the ten most active MPs, three were female MPs - Gordana Siljanovska Davkova, Zhaklina Lazarevska, and Eli Panova, two female MPs less in comparison to the previous monitoring period (July- December 2021). **Interestingly, the participation of women in the discussion during this period stayed at 42%, which is at the same level as in July - December 2021 and represents the highest level compared to all previous periods under observation.**

The report also notes a similar level of interaction and exchange of views among participants in discussions compared with the previous monitoring period (July – December 2021). In the monitored period, three parliamentary questions sessions were held out of six stipulated sessions in the Assembly's Rules of Procedure.

Participants did not use arguments in 51% of analysed discussions, while 42% of the analysed discussions had poor argumentation; that is, speakers offered an explanation of their positions which does not suffice to be considered a whole argument. There is a similar level of argumentation as in the previous period of monitoring for July- December 2021, and one can note a serious decline compared to the period between January-June 2021 and August – December 2020. One or more arguments are noted in 6.4% of the discussion, and facts were used only in 3% of the discussions.

In terms of how MPs respond to arguments presented by other MPs, the result of the monitoring was that in only 10% of their speeches, the MPs addressed the argument appropriately; that is, MPs responded directly to arguments that another participant of the session addressed to them previously. Furthermore, in 24% of discussions, MPs only partially addressed any referred arguments and partially distorted or ignored them. In 11% of the cases, arguments were not ignored but rather twisted, while in 9%, other MPs' arguments were completely ignored. In 46% of the cases, there were no referred arguments or questions by other MPs, which indicates a generally low level of discussion.

In this reporting period, in the discussions that were observed, **no change was noted in terms of MPs' positions because their interlocutors had a better argument or for any other reason**, which is indicative of a downward trend in comparison with the previous period when a change in position was noted in 9 MPs.

In the period from January to June 2022, monitoring was also conducted on the reviewing process of 12 reports of independent and regulatory bodies that were submitted to the Assembly. **2 reports were not discussed at plenary and committee sessions but were only presented by the submitters, while ten reports of independent and regulatory bodies were being discussed in plenary and committee sessions and were subject of certain scrutiny.** During this period, MPs were generally actively engaged in discussions and reviewing of most of the reports, given that the reviewing by the Assembly is of utmost importance to ensure bigger transparency of the work of the executive branch and provide citizens with better insight into the work of independent and regulatory bodies.

MPs focused more on reflecting on their interlocutors' personalities than listening to their arguments, which is consistent with the practice they have adopted since the start of their term in August 2020. **In 76% of their discussions, they showed no attitude regarding the arguments of others, and in 65% of the discussions, they had no attitude towards the personality of others.**

The report also confirms the constant lack of MPs' attention to the rights of marginalised groups in all periods under observation. In approximately 89,9% of their discussion, it is noted that the MPs **did not reflect on the rights of marginalised groups unless the discussion was specifically focused on a certain law or a topic from the agenda related to their rights.**

It is necessary to boost the quality of the discourse and the level of argumentation of the MPs' speeches in the Assembly, which may be achieved by: **Providing more information and know-how for MPs** on the topics under discussion, as well as improving their debate and oratory skills; the Assembly should be included in the process of **Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA)**; MPs should **use the shortened procedure and the procedure for reviewing the draft laws with the European flag carefully and as seldom as possible**; It is of essential importance that the MPs are better informed and have better understanding of the **influence the laws have on the lives of various groups of citizens**; MPs should proactively use the tools they have available in order to **reinforce their capacities for reviewing and debating laws**, including the trainings offered by the Parliament Support Program (PSP) and it is of essential importance for the Assembly to introduce **a session calendar**, that would help MPs to have more time to prepare for the topics on the agenda.

IV.

QUALITY OF THE DEBATE



IV. QUALITY OF THE DEBATE

■ DISCOURSE QUALITY SCORE

The score of the discourse quality for the period between January and June 2022, on a scale of 1 to 10, is 5,5 – which is indicative of a slight improvement in the quality of discussion compared to the period between July – December 2021, when the score of discourse quality was 5,4. Despite the mild improvement, the score of 5,5 for the parliamentary debate in the Assembly is below the minimum score required for it to be named as a debate, bearing in mind that virtually all parameters that contribute to the debate quality assessment are on the decline, such as degree of argumentation, degree to which the speaker shows respect towards the other MPs and their arguments; and openness towards embracing the arguments of others and changing one's views as a result of better quality arguments presented in the discussion. **In general terms, like in the previous periods, the quality of the debate is at a low level, and there is a lot of room for improvement.**

With a score of 5,5 the discussion in the Assembly does not meet the minimal score to be considered a debate, having in mind the low scores on almost all parameters that contribute to the score on discourse quality.

THE RATING OF THE DISCOURSE QUALITY FOR PERIOD BETWEEN JULY – DECEMBER 2021, ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 10



■ TYPE OF DISCUSSIONS

In this period (January- June 2022), 56% of the monitored discussions were part of plenary sessions, while 44% were committee sessions,⁴ and a **total of 2 025 individual discussions or addresses by MPs and external participants**⁵ in the debate were monitored.

In the first half of 2022, three sessions for MPs' questions were held, and one committee session dedicated to a public hearing and one committee session dedicated to the public discussion were also monitored. No oversight hearings were held in this period. Of all monitored discussions, 35% referred to legislative changes and amendments, and 13% to new proposed laws. 12% of the discussions referred to reports of independent and regulatory bodies, 7% were dedicated to MPs' questions, and 33% of monitored discussions referred to other acts, including discussions about acts for the Budget of RNM, interpellation of the Assembly President, appointments, voting for a new government, financial reports of independent and regulatory bodies, proposals for decisions, strategies, European Commission (EC) Report on the Republic of North Macedonia for 2021, etc. The government proposed the vast majority (79%) of the draft laws, amendments and additions to the laws and other acts, while the MPs officially proposed only 21% of the acts. Out of all the observed acts, 72% were reviewed using a regular procedure, 13% using a shortened procedure, and 15% of the Assembly acts that were observed were reviewed with a European flag.

The MPs should carefully and minimally use the shortened procedure and the procedure of consideration of draft laws with the European flag.

In the period January - June 2022, of the observed acts, 72% were carried out with a normal procedure, 13% with a shortened procedure, while 15% of the observed acts in the Parliament were reviewed with a European flag.

4 Committee on Political System and Inter-Community Relations, Committee on Finance and Budget, Committee on European Affairs, Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, Committee on Supervision of the Implementation of the Measures for Communication Surveillance, Committee on Transportation, Committee on Labor and Social Policy, and Committee on Relations Among Communities.

5 External participants in discussions of the Assembly are all speakers in plenary and committee sessions without status of an MP, but entitled to take part in the parliamentary discussion, such as the Prime Minister, ministries, representatives of regulatory bodies and agencies, etc.

In comparison with many questions of public interest, this period was notable the discussion regarding changes and amendments to the state budget and the new government which was voted in January 2022.

In the sessions that were monitored, the biggest discussions were on the topics of "Proposal for changes and amendments to the Budget of the Republic of North Macedonia for 2022 ", "Proposal for the composition of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia "and "Proposal for a Law on Changes and Amendments to the Law on Minimal Wage in the Republic of North Macedonia ". There were extensive discussions also on the "Proposal for a decision to dismiss a member of the Committee on elections and appointment issues of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia," as well as for "Interpellation of the work of the President of the Republic of North Macedonia, Talat Xhaferi ".

Given the political affiliation of the speakers that were observed in this period, MPs from the parliamentary majority, consisting of SDSM and the coalition, DUI and DPA, participated in 36% of the discussions under observation, while the opposition, composed of VMRO-DPMNE and the coalition, the coalition of Alliance for Albanians, Alternativa and Levica, took part in 64% of the observed discussions.⁶

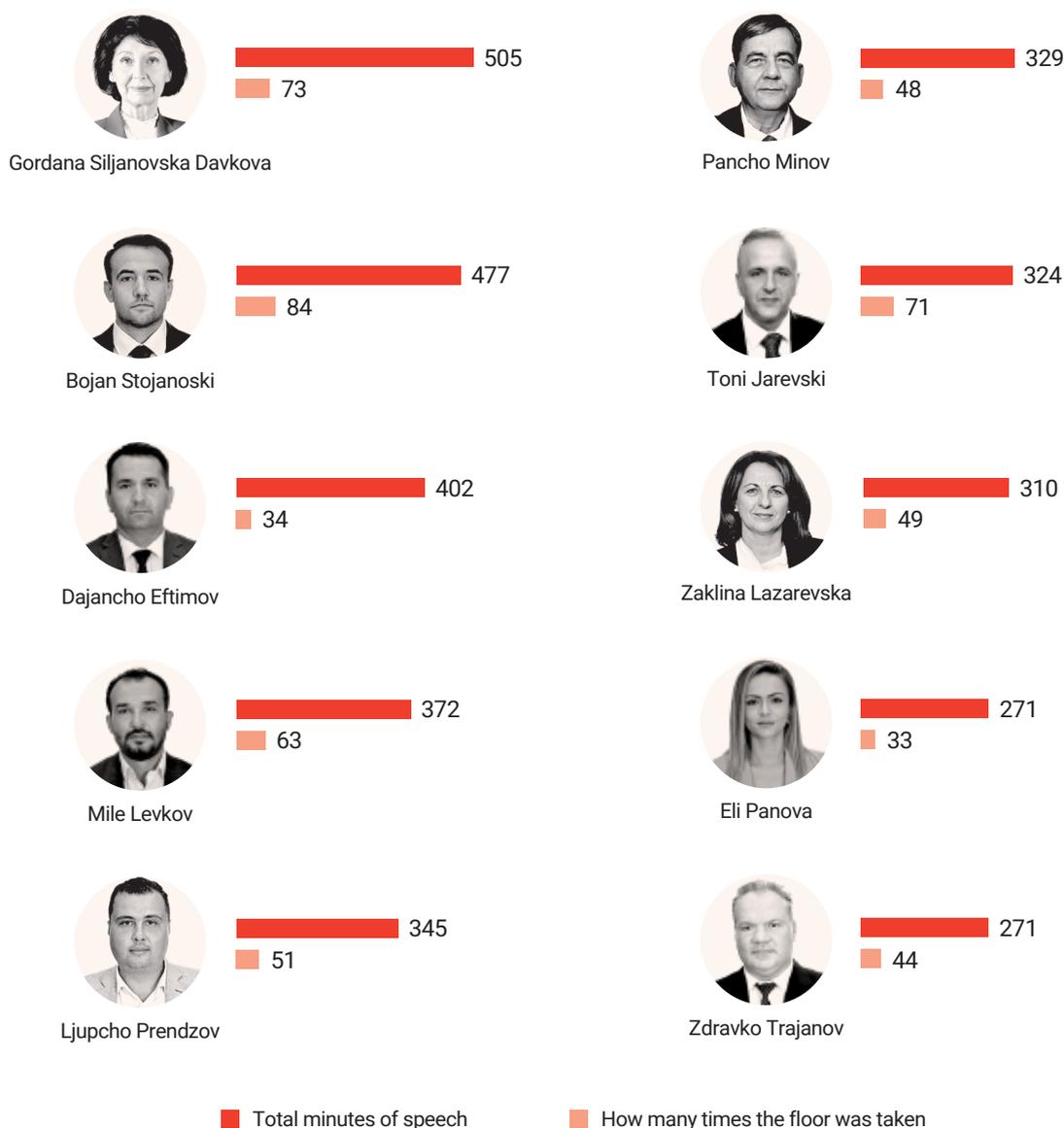
Graph 1. The political affiliation of the MPs



⁶ The composition of the parliamentary majority and the opposition changed in December 2021, when a new ruling coalition was established made up of SDSM and the coalition, DUI, DPA and Alternativa, while the opposition comprised of VMRO-DPMNE and the coalition, Alliance for Albanians, the BESA Movement and Levica.

The most active MPs, i.e., the ones that were on the rostrum the longest, are Gordana Siljanovska Davkova with 505 minutes, Bojan Stojanovski with 477 minutes and Dajancho Eftimov with 402 minutes. Regarding the number of times they requested to take the floor, MP Bojan Stojanovski is again the most active (on 84 occasions), MP Gordana Siljanovska Davkova on 73 occasions and Toni Jarevski on 71 occasions. **Among the top ten MPs in terms of the time spent on the podium in the observed period, there are three female MPs, Gordana Siljanovska Davkova, Zaklina Lazarevska and Eli Panova.**

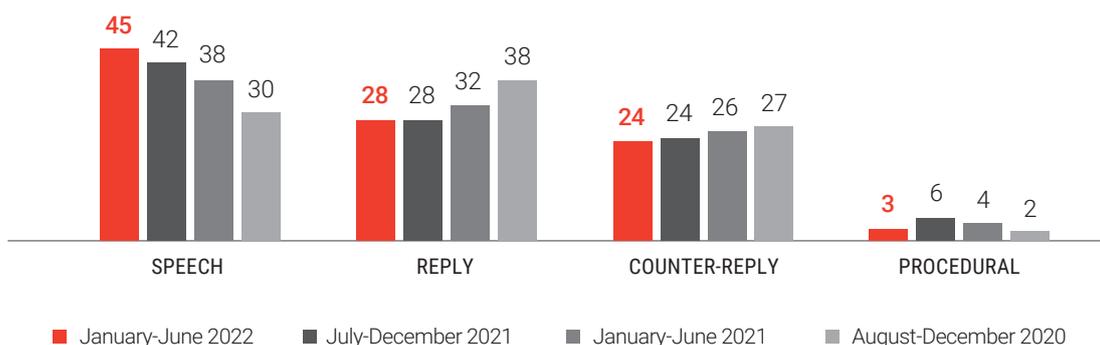
Graph 2. Which MPs were most active?



According to the type of discussions under observation in this period, most were speeches (45%), while 28% of the discussions were taken up by replies and 24% by counter-replies. This points to a somewhat satisfactory interaction between MPs, but the reduced number of counter-replies is also a sign of reduced interest in discussion among MPs. The MPs exercised their right to a procedural remark 58 times to express their views and opinions, a decline of three percentage points compared to the previous period of monitored discussions.

The interaction between MPs was at a relatively satisfactory level, but in general, most of the time was devoted to speeches. This indicates a generally low interest in discussion between MPs.

Graph 3. Type of discussions (%)



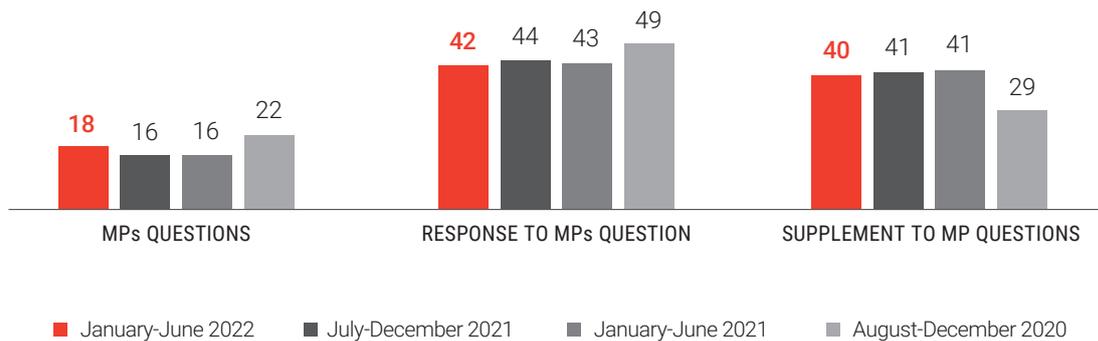
During this period, three sessions of MP questions were held, thus limiting the possibility of the Parliament to control and supervise the executive power.

According to the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, the legislature must hold a session for MPs questions every Thursday of the month.⁷ In this observation period between January and June 2022, only three sessions for MPs' questions were held out of six stipulated in the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly. MPs' questions are a key tool for overseeing the work of the government, but also for holding it accountable. Therefore, it is crucial that the Assembly consistently organises sessions for MP questions. At the sessions held in April, May and ▶

⁷ Rules of Procedure of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia <<https://www.sobranie.mk/content/Delovnik%20na%20RM/DelovniknaSRMPrecistentekstAvgust13.pdf>>

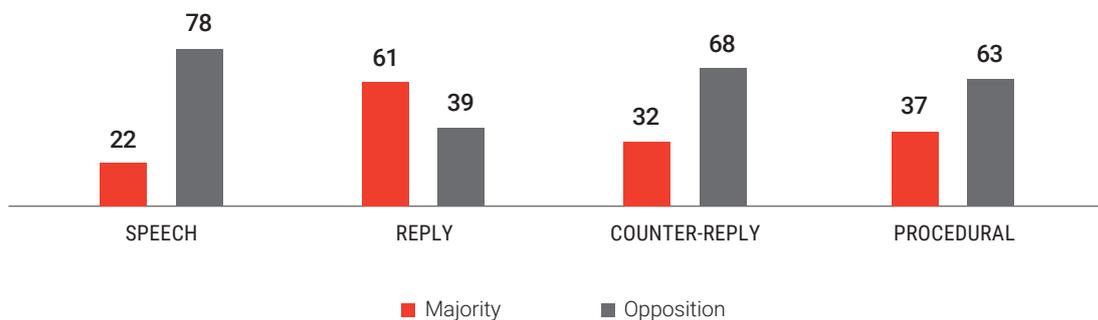
► June, 27 MP questions and 59 additional MPs questions were asked, or 58% of the discussion at these sessions was dedicated to questions, while the rest of the discussion was dedicated to answers to MPs questions (42%) by Government representatives.

Graph 3.1 Sessions for MPs' questions (%)



In terms of the type of discussion by the political affiliation of the speakers, one can note that most of the discussion was raised by the opposition through their speeches (78%) regarding the topics on the agenda, while most of the replies were given by the parliamentary majority (61%). Most counter-replies (68%) and procedural remarks (63%) came from the opposition. **The type of discussions and their duration is regulated by Articles 86 and 89 of the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia.**⁸

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



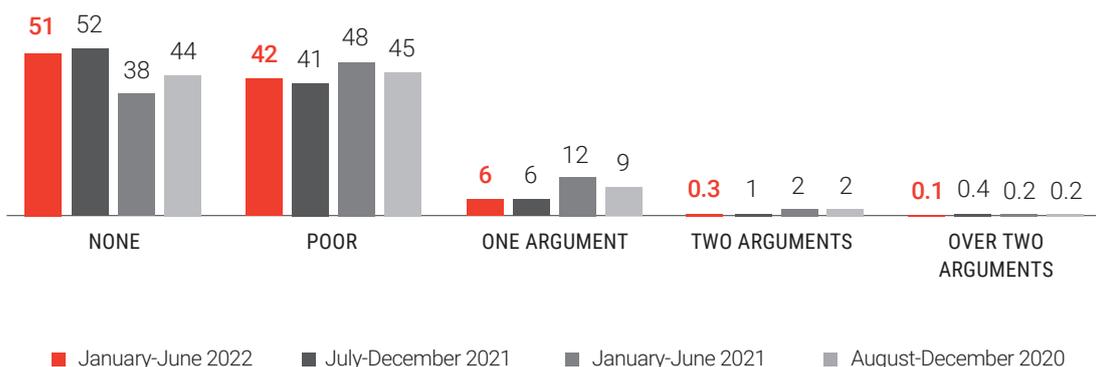
8 Rules of Procedure of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia
<https://www.sobranie.mk/content/Delovnik%20na%20RM/DelovniknaSRMPrecistentekstAvgust13.pdf>

■ LEVEL OF ARGUMENTATION

In 51% of the analysed discussions, the participants had no arguments, while in 42% of the analysed discussions, their argumentation was poor; that is, the speakers' rationale for their positions was insufficient for it to be considered a complete argument. The level of argumentation is similar to the previous period of monitoring between July – December 2021, and generally, there is a notable downward trend compared to the period between January-June 2021 and August- December 2020. In only 6% of observed discussions, speakers used one argument to expand on their position, which is at the same level as the previous period. Only six speakers used two arguments, while during the observed discussions, speakers used more than two arguments to support their position in 3 instances or only 0,1% of the observed addresses.

In 51% of the analyzed discussions, the participants had no arguments, while in 42% of the analyzed discussions they had weak argumentation, that is, the speakers offered an explanation of their positions that is not enough to be considered as a complete argument.

Graph 5. Level of argumentation in discussions (%)

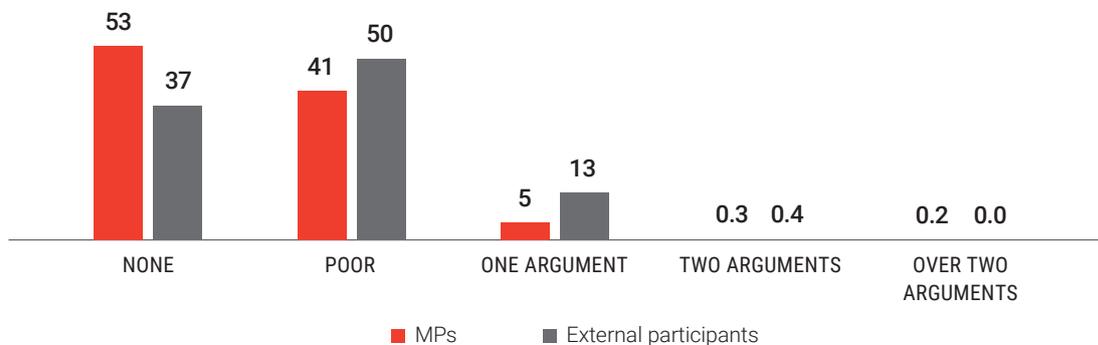


Out of a total of 2 025 speeches of MPs and external participants that were monitored, 88% (1787) were given by MPs, while 12% (238) were given by external participants, that is, all speakers in the plenary and committee sessions that do not hold the status of MPs, but have the right to participate in the debate of the Assembly, such as the Prime Minister, the ministers, representatives of regulatory bodies and agencies etc.

In general, the level of argumentation is at a low level in the discussions of both categories of speakers, MPs and external participants, which indicates a general lack of a culture of debate.

If we analyse the degree of argumentation according to the type of speaker, the MPs use fewer arguments compared to the external participants in the discussion. On the other hand, virtually half of the discussions of external participants are marked with weak argumentation, compared with 41% of MPs' discussions. **Generally, the level of argumentation is poor in the discussions of both speaker categories, MPs and external participants.**

Graph 5.1 Level of argumentation of discussions according to the type of participants in the discussion (%)



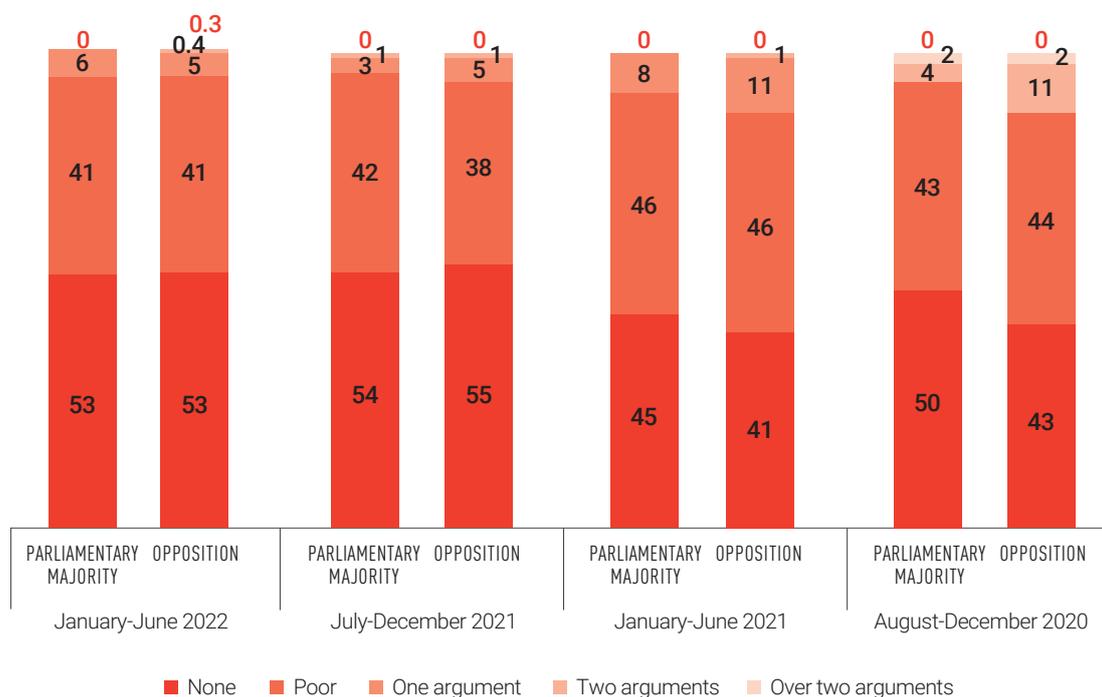
Analysed by the political affiliation of MPs, 41% of the discussions led by the parliamentary majority MPs were poorly supported by arguments, while in 53% of the cases, no rationale could be identified regarding the topic of discussion at the session. In 6% of the discussions of the parliamentary majority, one argument was identified, while two or more arguments were not noticed. Compared to the degree of argumentation in the discussions in the previous period under observation, the degree of argumentation of the parliamentary majority is generally the same, with insignificant differences..

Regarding the discussion of the opposition MPs between January- June 2022, 41% are marked by poor argumentation, while in 53% of the discussions, they did not use any arguments at all. Compared to the previous period, among the opposition, there has been an increase of 3 percentage points regarding the number of discussions with poor argumentation (July-December 2021, 38%). In 5% of the cases, opposition MPs used one argument, while 8 MPs used two or more arguments in their discussions, which is in line with the monitoring report for the previous period.

Regarding the level of argumentation, the opposition and majority do not differ considerably regarding the level of argumentation in their speeches in the Assembly.

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

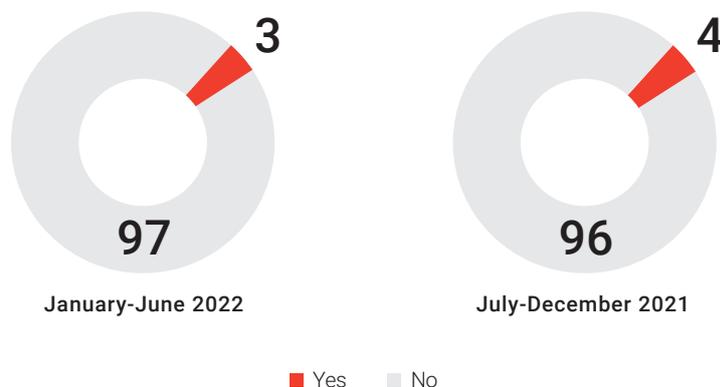


According to the methodology developed by the Institute for Democracy for observation of the discourse quality in the Assembly, “arguments” are defined as a reasonable (elaborated) attempt to persuade the public to accept a certain point of view for a debatable thesis that is, the argument is the reason why the MPs support or oppose certain thesis. Well -argued speech is the one that contains an assertion - the title of the argument, a sentence that asserts something; an explanation - clarifying and linking the assertion and its essence, that is, decomposing and probing the essence of the argument and the case; and evidence – with a note that the argument would be just an empty phrase if there is no valid and robust support with evidence. **In order to disentangle and better identify the different elements of the arguments used during the discussion in the Assembly, a measurement was introduced since April 2021, using an additional tool in the questionnaire for monitoring the discourse quality, whether MPs use facts from research, experience, documents and other relevant sources, as an essential part of the whole argument.**

In only 3% of the discussions observed in this period, MPs used facts from research, experience and other relevant sources which confirms the overall low degree of argumentation.

In terms of parliamentary sessions that were observed in **the period between January- June 2022**, in 97% of the discussions that were observed, MPs did not use research facts, experience, documents, and other relevant sources as part of their explanation of why they support or not a certain act. In only 3% of the discussions observed in this period, MPs used facts, which confirms the overall low degree of argumentation.

Graph 7. Does the MP use facts from research, experience, documents and other relevant sources? (%)

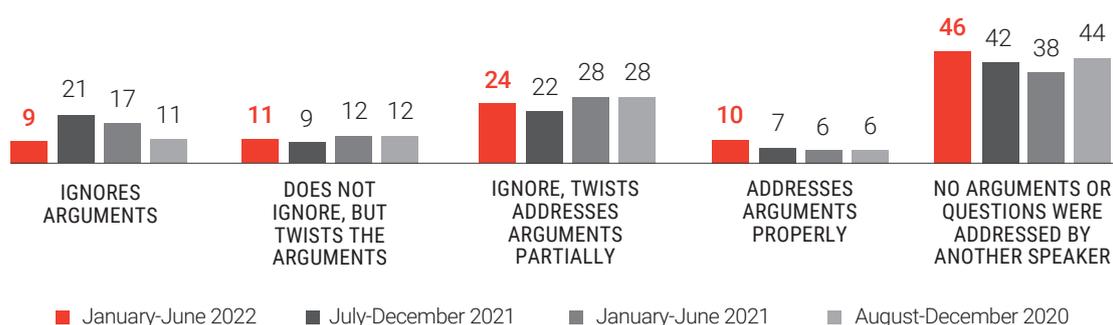


■ ACCOUNTABILITY

In terms of how the MPs respond to arguments presented by other MPs, the result of the monitoring was that in only 10% of their speeches, the MPs addressed the argument appropriately; that is, the MP directly responded to the arguments that were initially addressed to them by another participant at the session. Furthermore, in 24% of the discussion, MPs partially responded to the arguments presented to them and partially twisted or ignored them. In 11% of the cases, the arguments were not ignored but were altered, while in 9% of the cases, the arguments of the other MPs were completely ignored. In 46% of the cases, there were no arguments or questions from other MPs, which indicates a low level of discussion in general. In comparison to the previous period of monitoring, that is, July – December 2021, it is evident that the level of discussion on this issue remains relatively unchanged, except for the decline by 12 percentage points in the explicit ignoring of the arguments of other MPs by the MP on the speaker podium. There is also a slight increase of three percentage points in the appropriate addressing of arguments of other MPs engaged in the discussion.

In only 10% of their presentations, MPs adequately addressed the arguments, that is, the MP directly responded to arguments previously addressed to him by another participant in the discussion.

Graph 8. Accountability of MPs (%)



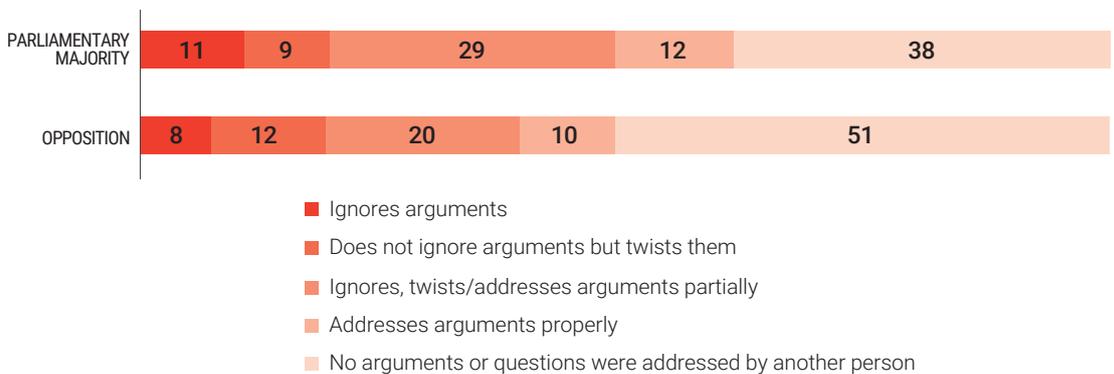
Analysed by MPs’ political affiliation, the majority of MPs adequately addressed the arguments in 12% of the discussion. The same was noted in 10% of the opposition MPs’ discussions.

In 28% of their discussion, the opposition MPs partially responded to arguments and partially twisted or ignored them, while the parliamentary majority MPs did the same in 20% of the discussion. The parliamentary majority did not ignore the arguments in 9% of the discussion but distorted them, while the opposition did the same in 12% of their discussions. The parliamentary majority ignored the arguments of other participants in 11% of the discussion, while the opposition ignored the arguments of others in 8% of their addresses.

In 38% of the government’s discussion and in 51% of the opposition’s discussion, no arguments or questions were made by other speakers that they can answer or address, which indicates a low involvement of the majority in the discussion.

In 38% of the discussions of the parliamentary majority and 51% of the discussion of the opposition MPs, no arguments or questions were referred to other speakers, which may be responded to or addressed.

Graph 9. Accountability by political affiliation (%)

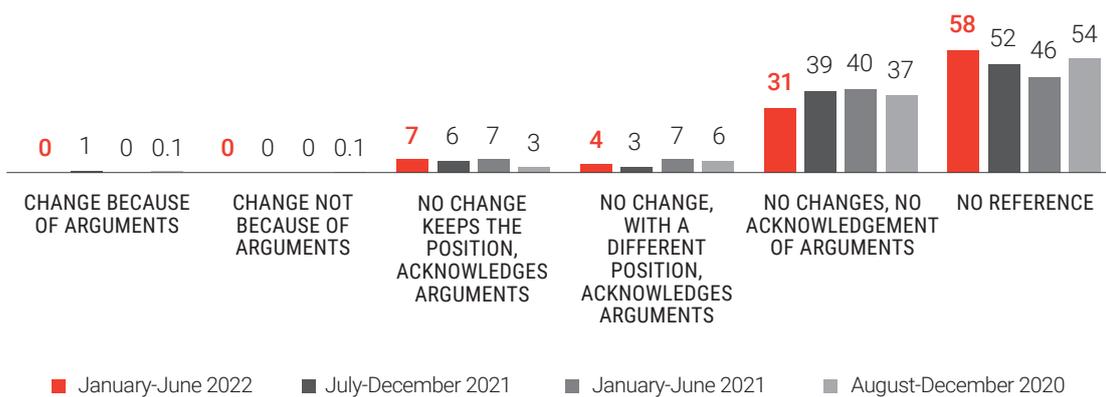


■ THE POWER OF A BETTER ARGUMENT

In the discussions observed during this reporting period, no significant change was noted in **MPs' position because of better arguments of interlocutors or any other reason**, indicative of a downward trend compared to the previous period when 9 MPs changed their position. In 58% of the discussion, no reference to the quality of argument of the other MPs was recorded, which is six percentage points more than in the previous period. In 7% of the discussions, the speakers did not change their views because the MPs had the same position and acknowledged the value of the arguments of their fellow party members. Additionally, in 4% of the discussion, MPs from various political options did not change their positions but acknowledged the value of arguments presented by their interlocutors from other political parties. **In conclusion, there is no significant shift in this monitoring parameter compared to the previous reporting period.**

In this reporting period, in the observed discussions, there was no change of position among MPs due to better arguments of the interlocutors or any other reason, which indicates a deterioration compared to the last period when a change of position was observed among 9 MPs.

Graph 10. Power of a better argument of MPs (%)



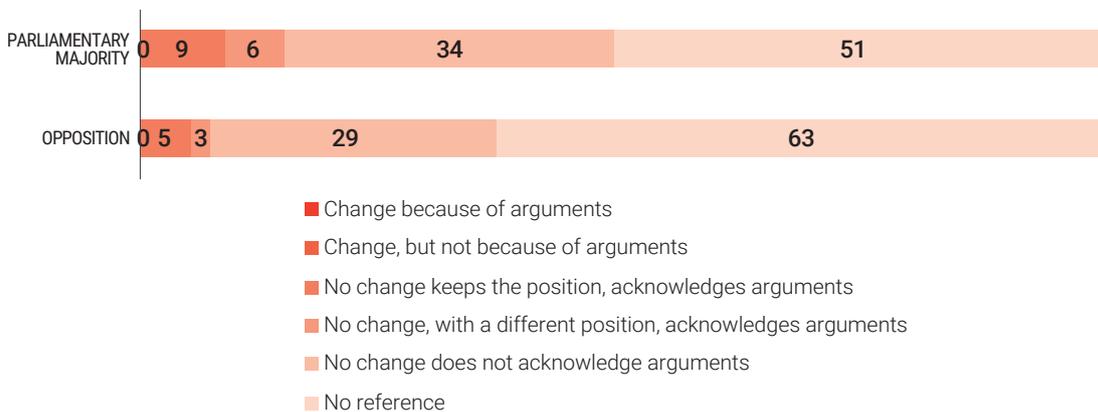
If one analyses the openness of the speakers to the arguments presented by other participants in the sessions by their political affiliation, it can be concluded that both sides focused more on presenting their positions. In 63% of the parliamentary majority discussions and 51% of opposition discussions, the MPs did not address the arguments of others.

The MPs from the government and the opposition did not change their position on any issue due to the persuasiveness of the arguments of their interlocutors.

Change of views and acknowledging the value of arguments presented by the speakers from the other option were not present in 34% of the parliamentary majority discussions; similarly, to the opposition discussions (29%). In 6% of the discussions, even though the parliamentary majority had a different position, they still recognised the value of arguments presented by others. The opposition responded similarly in 3% of their discussion. MPs of the ruling parties (9%) and the opposition (5%) also agreed with the positions of their fellow party members and explicitly acknowledged their arguments.

MPs of both the ruling parties and the opposition did not change their position on any matter due to the persuasiveness of the arguments of their interlocutors.

Graph 11. Power of a better argument by political affiliation (%)



■ REPORTS OF INDEPENDENT AND REGULATORY BODIES

Between January and June 2022, the reviewing of 12 reports submitted by independent and regulatory bodies submitted to the Assembly was observed. **There was no discussion regarding two reports at plenary or committee sessions, as they were only presented by those who submitted the reports, while the MPs discussed ten reports from independent and regulatory bodies in the committee and plenary sessions where the reports were subject to a certain level of scrutiny.** In this period, MPs were generally actively involved in the discussion and reviewing of most of the reports, given the huge importance of being reviewed in the Assembly in order to increase the transparency in the work of the executive, but also to provide the citizens with better insight in the work of the independent and regulatory bodies.

Table 1. Reports from independent and regulatory bodies

1	2020 Annual Report on the Work of Public Prosecution Offices of the Republic of North Macedonia	7	2021 Annual Report of the Ombudsman on the Extent of Respect, Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms
2	2020 Report on the Realisation of the Judicial Budget	8	2020 Annual Report on the Work of the Council of Public Prosecutors of the Republic of North Macedonia
3	2021 Annual Report on the Work of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia	9	2021 Annual Report on the Work of the Macedonian Radio-Television- Public Broadcasting Enterprise
4	2020 Annual Report on the Work of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia	10	2020 Annual Report on the Work of the Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Media Services
5	2021 Annual report on the Work of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption	11	2020 Annual Report on the work of the Agency for Insurance Supervision
6	2021 Annual Report on the Work of the State Commission for Second Instance Decision-Making in Inspection Supervision and Misdemeanor Procedure	12	2021 Annual Report on the Work of the Operational-Technical Agency

■ discussion did not take place ■ discussion took place



RESPECT, INTERRUPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS



V. RESPECT, INTERRUPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

■ ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE ARGUMENTS AND THE PERSONALITY OF MPS FROM ANOTHER PARTY

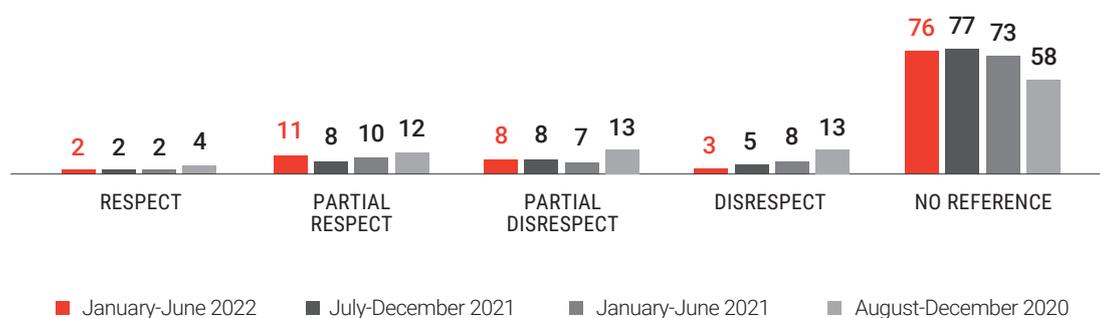
Various forms of disrespect towards speakers and their arguments can have an adverse effect on the potentially orderly atmosphere, which is the foundation of a rational and argumentative debate. At the same time, it can also shift the course of discussion and divert the MPs' focus to attacks and insults, creating a polarised setting and preventing substantive discussion.

During this period, arguments were respected in only 2% of the cases, while they were partially respected in 11% of the cases. Partial disrespect was demonstrated in 8% of the discussion, while complete disrespect towards the interlocutors' arguments was demonstrated in 3% of the discussion.

Compared to the previous period under observation, July- December 2021, one may notice that the attitude towards the arguments of MPs from the other political option remains relatively unchanged. In 76% of the discussions, MPs did not refer to the arguments of the others, at relatively the same level as in the previous period.

Compared to the previous periods of observation, it can be noted that the attitude towards the arguments of the MPs towards their colleagues from the other political camp, remains relatively unchanged.

Graph 12. Attitude towards the arguments of the MPs from another political party (%)

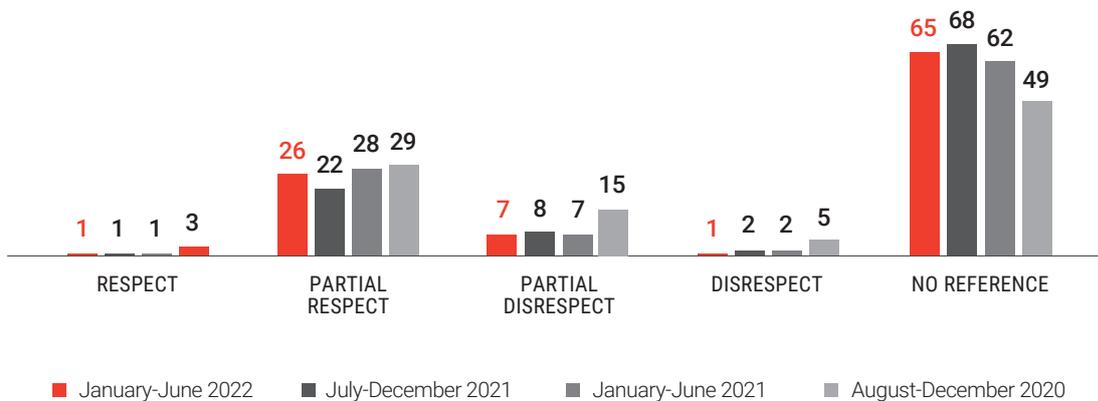


Regarding the attitude of the MPs towards the personality of their colleagues from another political option, in **1% of the discussion, there was respect, while in 26%, there was partial respect.** That means that MPs did not refrain from inserting expressions of contempt or mild insults and attacks on the personality of their colleagues from opposing political options. **The level of partial disrespect increased by four percentage points compared to the previous period under observation, July- December 2021. On the other hand, disrespect was noted in 1% of the discussions, and partial disrespect in 7% of the discussions.** In these cases, the speaker’s complete disrespect for the personality of other MPs in their discussions is expressed - by using offensive language. **Compared to the previous period, the degree of partial or full disrespect towards the personality of the MPs from another party remains virtually the same.**

In contrast to the previous period, when in 68% of the discussion the MPs did not express any attitude towards the person, this was the case in 65% this period of the observed discussion. This decrease by 3 percentage points indicates that MPs decided to refer to the personality of other speakers to a greater extent, compared to the last period.

Nonetheless, there is a difference in the percentage of speeches in which the MPs do not refer at all to the personality of their colleagues from another party. Unlike the previous period, when in 68% of the discussions, the MPs did not allude to the personality in any way; this was the case in 65% of the discussions in this period. The decline of three percentage points shows that MPs decided to address the personality of other speakers to a higher degree in comparison to the previous period.

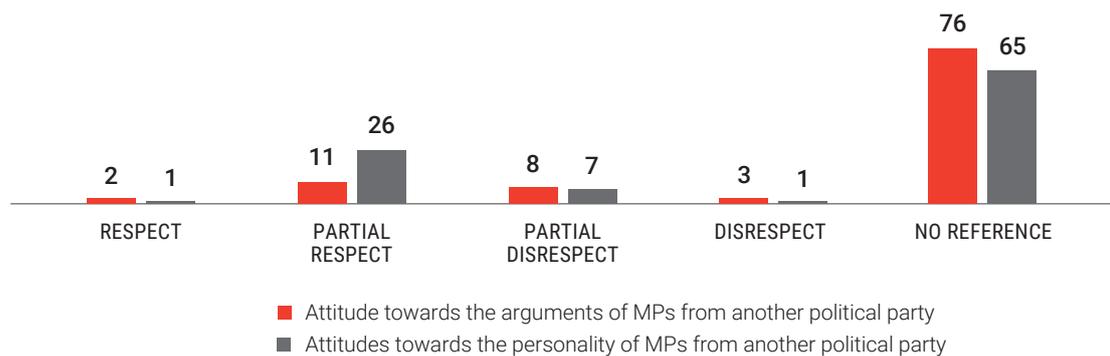
Graph 13. Attitude towards the personality of MPs from another party (%)



Between January and June 2022, MPs paid greater attention to the person of the interlocutor from the other political option rather than their arguments, which is in line with their established practice since the beginning of their term in August 2020. **In 76% of their discussions, they did not express any attitude toward the interlocutors' arguments, while they did not allude in any way to the personality of the other speaker in 65% of their discussions.** This attitude indicates that the MPs, in this reporting period, refer more to the personal characteristics of the interlocutors rather than substantial consideration of their arguments.

The MPs refer more to the personal characteristics of the interlocutors than to the essential consideration of their arguments.

Graph 14. Attitudes towards arguments and personality of MPs from another political party (%)



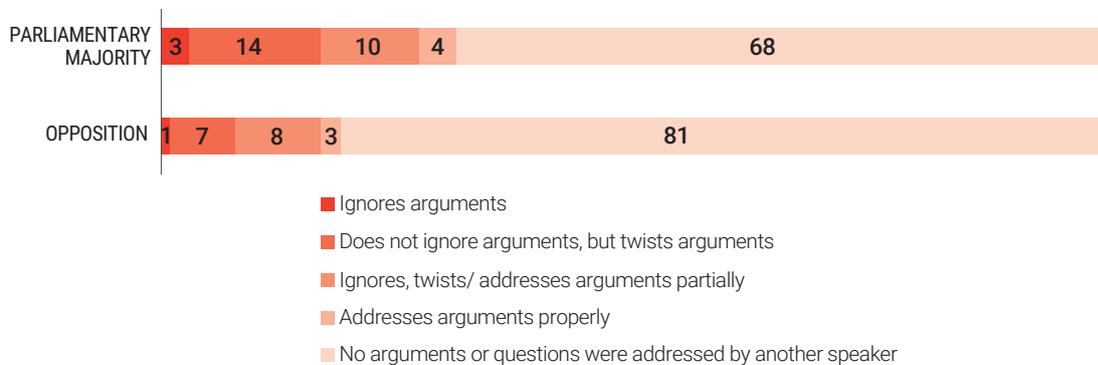
■ ATTITUDE TOWARDS ARGUMENTS AND PERSONALITY BY POLITICAL AFFILIATION OF MPS

MPs of the parliamentary majority made no reference to their interlocutors in 68% of their discussion, while in 14% of the cases, they showed partial respect or respect. In 17% of the discussion, there was partial disrespect or respect towards the opposition's arguments. In 81% of their addresses, the opposition MPs made no reference; that is, they had no attitude of respect or disrespect towards the arguments of the parliamentary majority. They demonstrated

partial disrespect or disrespect for the parliamentary majority arguments in 11% of their discussions and showed partial respect or respect in 8% of their discussion.

In most of their discussions, MPs from the government and the opposition did not refer to the arguments of their interlocutors.

Graph 15. Attitude towards argumentation and personality by political affiliation of MPs (%)

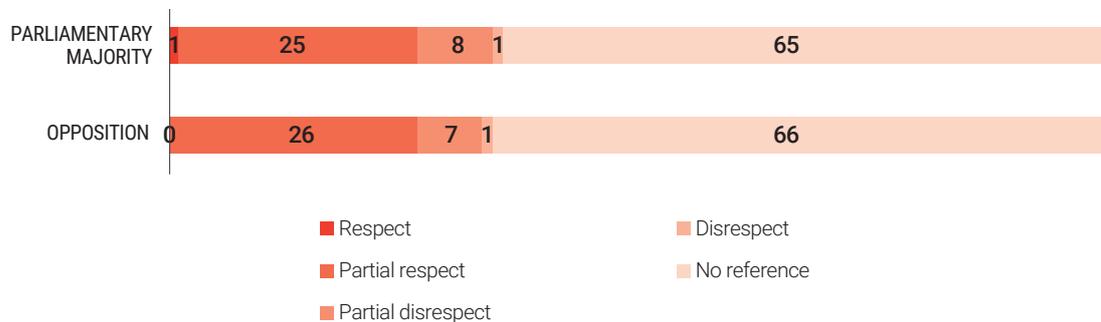


In terms of the attitude towards the personality of other MPs, in the speeches of the parliamentary majority MPs, respect was shown in 1%, in 25% of their discussions, there was partial respect, in 8% of their discussions, partial disrespect, and 1% of their discussions disrespect.

In 65% of the discussions, the parliamentary majority of MPs did not refer to the personality of the other MPs. The attitude of the opposition MPs towards the personality of their colleagues from the other political option is relatively similar. Thus, they showed partial respect in 18% of the analysed discussions, and respect was not shown at all. In 7% of the discussions, they showed partial disrespect and complete disrespect in 1% of the discussions. In 66% of their discussions, no reference was made to the personality of the MPs from other political parties.

MPs from the government expressed disrespect or partial disrespect for the personality of their colleagues in 9% of their discussions, while MPs from the opposition did so in 8% of their discussions.

Graph 16. Attitude towards argumentation and personality by political affiliation of MPs (%)



■ ATTITUDES TOWARDS ARGUMENTS AND PERSONALITY BY TYPE OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE DISCUSSION

In this period, the parliamentary majority of MPs showed respect towards the arguments of the external participants in 8% of their discussions, and they showed partial respect also in 15% of the discussions. The parliamentary majority of MPs did not show disrespect towards the external participants in their discussion, while in 77% of the cases, they did not refer to their arguments. Unlike the ruling majority, the opposition showed respect towards the arguments of external participants only in 1% of the discussions and partial disrespect in 14% of their discussions. Partial disrespect was shown in 9% of the discussion, while disrespect towards the arguments of the external participants was shown in 2% of the discussion. In 74% of their discussions, the opposition MPs did not refer to the arguments of the external participants in the discussions.

MPs from the government expressed more respect for the arguments of external participants (23%), compared to MPs from the opposition (15%).

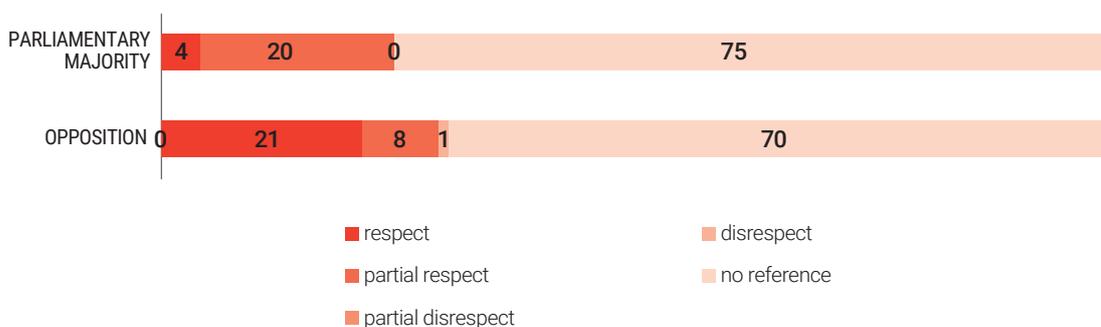
Graph 17. Attitude towards arguments of external participants (%)



Regarding the attitude of the MPs towards the personality of the external participants, **the parliamentary majority MPs had no references in 75% of their discussions; in 4% of the discussions, there was respect and partial disrespect in 20% of their discussions.** In their discussions, the parliamentary majority MPs did not disrespect the personality of external participants. **On the other hand, the opposition MPs did not show complete respect towards the external participants in their discussions. In contrast, in 21% of their discussions, they showed partial disrespect** – that means that MPs did not resist inserting mocking or slightly offensive expressions in the discussions and attacked the personality of external participants. In 8% of the discussions, partial disrespect was noted, while in 1% of their discussion, there was disrespect– in these cases, the speakers expressed complete disrespect in their discussions for the personality of the external participants - using offensive language. Opposition MPs did not express any attitude towards the personality of the external participants in 70% of their discussions.

Members of the government expressed respect or partial respect for the personality of external participants in 24% of their discussions. On the other hand, MPs from the opposition did not express full respect at all, while in 21% of the discussion they expressed partial respect.

Graph 18. Attitude towards the personality of the external participants (%)



During this and previous reporting periods, MPs rarely used stories, anecdotal details, or testimonies in their discussion. Such elements were noted in 2% of all discussions.

There were **interruptions in the discussions by other MPs in only 1% of the speeches**. The interruptions lasted 10 seconds at most and were most often caused by shouting at the speakers by MPs who had not been given a floor at that moment. **In 3 discussions (0.1%), the speaker was prevented from speaking**, out of which in 1 speech, the speaker indicated that they were prevented from speaking, while in 2 speeches, there was a passive obstruction of the speakers. In the biggest number of speeches (57%), speakers used gestures in their discussion, and in 2% of the discussion, one could notice the use of paraphernalia in the discussion. In 40% of the discussions, there were no explicit gestures, and in 1% of the discussions, the gestures were directed towards others.

The MPs in general are free and uninterrupted in the expression of their opinions on the rostrum

VI.

**MARGINALISED GROUPS
IN THE ASSEMBLY**



VI. MARGINALISED GROUPS IN THE ASSEMBLY

As part of monitoring the quality of discourse in the Assembly, the analysis also includes the marginalised groups and to what extent MPs in their speeches refer to their needs and rights. **Between January and June 2022, in 89.9% of their speeches, MPs failed to refer to the rights and needs of marginalised groups. One can notice that MPs fail to address the rights and needs of marginalised groups in their speeches unless the discussion refers to a specific law or topic on the agenda concerning their rights.** One has to be aware that many laws have various impacts on various groups of citizens; therefore, in reviewing the items on the agenda, MPs should consider more aspects that would potentially influence the citizens of the marginalised groups. In the discussions that were observed in this period, the groups that are included in the discussion the most, **albeit still by a small percentage, are young people (4,4%), women (2,5%) and people with disabilities (0,9%),** while single parents were not included at all, and members of the LGBTI+ community were included in only five speeches.

In most of their discussions, MPs do not refer to the rights of marginalized groups, unless a specific law or topic on the agenda related to their rights is specifically tabled.

Table 2.

Marginalised groups	Speeches (%)	Speeches (number)
People with disabilities	0.9	19
Social welfare beneficiaries	1.2	25
Unemployed people	0.4	9
Elderly people	0.3	7
Roma	0.4	8
Single parents	0	0
LGBT +	0.2	5
Women	2.5	50
Citizens in rural areas	1.2	24
Young people	4.4	89
Other	2.1	43
No reference to marginalised groups	89.9	1825

VII.

THE DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE OF SPEAKERS

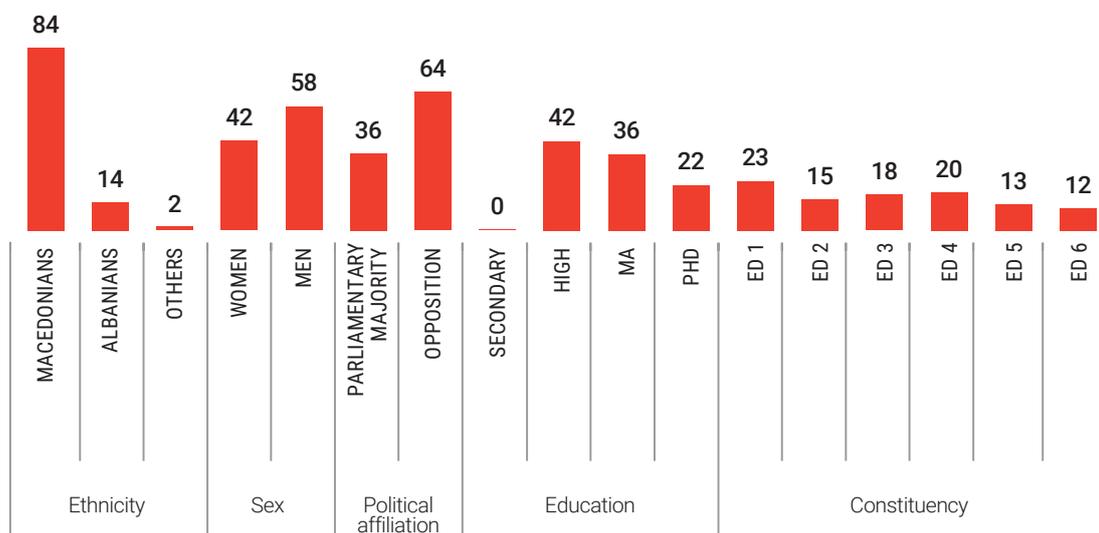


VII. THE DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE OF SPEAKERS

The demographic structure of the speakers, in terms of ethnicity, sex, education and constituency, remains relatively the same compared to the previous period of July- December 2021. During the monitoring period, one can note that the participation of women in the discussion is 42%, but remains on the same level as in the period between July-December 2021, which is the highest participation compared to all previous monitoring periods.

The participation of women in the discussion is at a high 42% and remains relatively at the same level as in the period July - December 2021, which represents the highest participation compared to all previous periods of observation.

Graph 19. Demographic structure of speakers MPs (%)



VIII.

RECOMMENDATIONS



VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The discourse culture of MPs in our Assembly, corroborated by clear and solid arguments that directly support the advocated position, is relatively low. **The reports of the Institute for Democracy on the discourse quality in the current composition of the Assembly (elected in July 2020) indicate that many of the discussions in the Assembly were poorly supported by arguments.** In other words, most of the positions that the MPs represented in the Assembly were not based on evidence, and no appropriate elaborations were provided for those positions. **This is also the attitude of the citizens, the majority of which said that there is a low level of argumentation in the speeches of MPs, assessing that they rarely or never use arguments in their speeches.**⁹

For these reasons, it is necessary to increase the discourse quality and the level of argumentation in the speeches of the MPs in the Assembly. This section of the report on debate quality includes several recommendations and tools available to the MPs to achieve a higher quality of debate.

Increasing the information and knowledge on the topics discussed and improving the debating and oratory skills of the MPs can significantly contribute to a better debate in the Assembly. The Parliamentary Institute (PI) and the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO), which operate under the Assembly, offer services that may be helpful in addressing these needs of the MPs. Namely, the PI and the PBO research topics of interest for the MPs, while the PI also offers education and training in specific areas. For these reasons, the services of the PI and the PBO must be used to a greater extent and more effectively.

The Assembly should be involved in the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) process, which would significantly increase the quality and argumentation of the discussions. The RIA contributes to improving the quality of the decision-making process, providing information on the effects and ramifications of the new regulatory measures, and assessing and monitoring the existing regulation. This tool is used by the government as the entity that proposes most of the laws in the country, but not by the Assembly. Due to these reasons, the Assembly has assumed the role of the evaluator of the government proposals, but it is generally inconsistent in this role, as the argumentation of the MPs is insufficiently focused on the content of the proposed regulation or the discussion lacks argumentation. Thus, if the Assembly was to apply the RIA and if the MPs were to actively practice RIA, as those that propose laws, there would be a discussion with more argumentation, and it would enable more informed decisions to be made.

9 Average values for the period from 2020 – 2021 obtained from the reports: “Results of the Field Survey on Citizens’ Perception of the Work of the Assembly” (2020) IDSCS. Results of the Field Survey on Citizens’ Perception of the Work of the Assembly” (2021) IDSCS.

MPs should be careful when using the shortened procedure and the procedure for reviewing draft laws with the European flag, and such use should be minimal. The shortened and urgent procedure reduces the time for discussion, provides less time for discussion, and in some cases, voting without discussion. The discussion in the Assembly is limited even to draft laws bearing the European flag, which signifies that the specific law is to be harmonised with the European Union *acquis*. The abuse of these mechanisms limits the debate among MPs, negatively affects its quality, denies MPs the right to speak, and deprives them of making informed decisions. Such abuse inevitably results in hasty and inadequate legal solutions.

It is essential to upgrade the expertise and understanding of the MPs on the impact of the laws on the lives of different groups of citizens. That can be partially achieved using the analyses of the Parliamentary Institute (PI) and the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO). In addition, they should also look up the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) reports drafted by the government and consult with experienced parliamentary officials, citizens and the NGO sector on the impact of the laws. An added value during the debate is the use of *examples* from experience, concerns or the interests of the voters (office for communication with citizens, personal stories, media stories, local businesses), as well as from responding to and adequately dealing with sexist or *discriminatory* remarks or speech in the Assembly.

MPs, in addition to the expertise of the PI and PBO, have other tools at their disposal as well that can help them strengthen their capacity to review and discuss laws, including training offered by the Parliament Support Program (PSP), which is supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). This program provides the MPs with training on policy analysis and harmonisation with EU legislation, training on regulatory impact assessment (RIA), impact on gender equality and budgetary implications of laws, RIA simulations for the parliamentary services and the parliamentary channel, support for Assembly for inclusion of RIA for the proposed laws, as well as strengthening of knowledge and skills for conducting an argument-based debate, including skills for public speaking and cooperation with the media.

10 Dimeski, Jane, "Debate in Trenches – Analysis of the Quality of Discussion in the Assembly, June 2014 – May 2015", IDSCS, (2015), available at: <<https://idsocs.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/rovovska-debata-mk.pdf>>

11 Blizanakovski Jovan "Comparative Good Practices and Use of RIA and Possibilities for Implementation in Macedonia", IDSCS, (2017), available at: <<https://idsocs.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/WEB-Компаративни-добри-практики-на-примена-на-ПВР-и-можности-за-нив-на-имплементација-во-Македонија.pdf>>

12 Dimitrievski, Dejan «Enactment of a law by abbreviated or urgent procedure» Parliamentary Institute, (2017) available at: <<https://www.sobranie.mk/content/PI/>>

Finally, a calendar of sessions needs to be introduced, following the example set by the Parliaments in Western Europe. The calendar of sessions would enable predictability of the work of the Assembly, and it would enable greater preparation time for MPs concerning the items on the agenda. If MPs had more time to prepare along with a more predictable schedule, they would be able to acquire sufficient information on draft laws, the amendments and additions to the laws, the reports of the regulatory and independent bodies and the other acts in the Assembly in due time. The predictability of the sessions would enable high-quality and well-argued debate.

IX. 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 party	[-1:1]	10
Attitude towards the arguments of the participants from another political party	[-1:1]	10
Attitude towards the external participants	[-1:1]	2,5
Attitude towards the arguments of the 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	Scores	Scope of explanation	Scores
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	Scores
Properly addressed arguments	2
Partially ignores, twists, addresses the arguments	1
No addressed arguments or questions from another speaker	0
Ignores arguments	-1
Does not ignore, but twists the argument	-2

Power of better argument	Scores
Change due to arguments	5
No change, with different position, acknowledges arguments	3
No change, keeps the position, acknowledges arguments	1
No change, no acknowledgement of arguments	0
Change, not deriving from arguments	0
No reference	0

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

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

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

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

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

Interruptions	Scores
No interruption	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 transformations so that the original score did not lose the positive or negative sign. Hence, the universal transformation formula is:

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

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:

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

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 Parliament 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 THE IDSCS

The Institute for Democracy «Societas Civilis» Skopje (IDSCS) is a think-tank that carries out research of the development of good governance, rule of law and the European integration of North Macedonia. The IDSCS mission is to assist civic involvement in the decision-making process and to reinforce the participative political culture. By reinforcing freethinking values, IDSCS contributes towards the coexistence of differences.

As of June 2014, the IDSCS has been monitoring the parliamentary debate quality and the media reporting on the work of the Assembly. The monitoring in the first cycle lasted for 10 months, that is from June 2014 until May 2015. The second period of monitoring and assessment of the quality of the parliamentary debate and media reporting started in September 2015, supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and lasted until December 2017. The third period of monitoring the debate quality began in January 2018 and lasted until December 2019. As of January 2020, the Institute for Democracy has been monitoring the work of the Assembly and the debate quality within the Parliamentary Support Programme (PSP).

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This publication is available online at:

<https://idscs.org.mk/en/2022/08/24/parliament-watch-monitoring-report-on-the-debate-quality-in-the-parliament-january-june-2022/>

