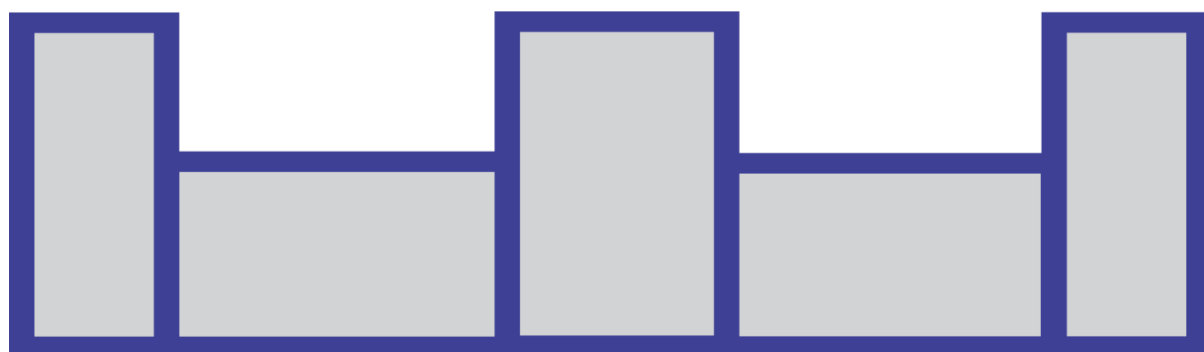




SECOND MONITORING REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF THE DEBATE IN THE PARLIAMENT



PARLIAMENT WATCH

**Strengthening Political Debate
and Deliberative Discourse**

AUGUST- SEPTEMBER 2014



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The project is funded by the European Union

Second Monitoring Report on the Quality of the Debate in the Parliament

(25 August – 30 September)

The Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis” – Skopje (IDSCS) and the Institute for Central-Eastern and Balkan Europe (IECOB) starting from June 2014 are monitoring the quality of the debates in the Assembly. The monitoring is part of the project “Parliament Watch! Strengthening the political debate and deliberative discourse” financially supported by the European Union. During the monitoring period 10 monthly reports with the main findings will be published.

Through applying the ‘Discourse Quality Index’¹ each speech act in the plenary and in the sessions of eight parliamentary committees, selected according their importance for the political debate and political culture in the country, is being assessed based on several parameters.

The main goal of this monitoring is to reach to empirical conclusions about the level and quality of argumentation of the parliamentary debates and to measure to what extent different opinions and standpoints influence and contribute to law-making.

Simultaneously within the project, monitoring of 10 media with national coverage and distribution is conducted with aim to draw conclusions on the extent of which the general public is informed about the arguments placed forward by the Members of the Parliament (MPs).

A. Summary

The monitoring period of this report is 25 August-30 September. It includes 21 parliamentary sessions. The main conclusions are that the discussion about the legislation remains weak, but the MPs had little more interaction compared to the first monitoring period 19 June – 31 July.

The increased interaction is reflected through the increased number of replies and counter replies on part of the legislative proposals. This allowed the public to get views from different angles on several

¹Steiner J., Bächtiger A., Spörndli M., Steenbergen M.R, *Deliberative Politics in Action: Analyzing Parliamentary Discourse*

The original Discourse Quality Index (DQI) is created by a group of eminent world theoreticians of the deliberative democracy. The DQI was used for similar empirical researches in several national parliaments: Germany, USA, and Switzerland; as well as the European Parliament.



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topics of parliamentary discussions. However, most of the topics from the parliamentary agenda passed with little and one-sided discussion or without any debate.

Therefore, the public was deprived of a quality debate on large part of the discussions. The opportunity to test the validity and the strength of the arguments through debate was missed. That does not allow the arguments to be opposed or supplemented in favor of creating better public policies for the common good and public interest.

Characteristic of the monitoring period is that the MPs from the main opposition block lead by SDSM, are boycotting the work of the Parliament. Also, the work of the Assembly in this period was boycotted by the opposition MPs from the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA).

Generally, the MPs remained in their “trenches”. Most of the individual MP discussions did not refer to other speeches and did not manage to persuade other MPs to change their position and standpoints. With this, the MPs in general did not display readiness to amend their positions under the force of better arguments brought in the discussions by other speakers.

At the beginning of the period covered with this report (26 August) at the session of the parliamentary Committee for financing and budget a violent incident broke out between MPs from the DPA and the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI). This happened during the debate for the state budget reallocation. During this session, forms of offensive and inappropriate speech with personal attacks were noted but also complete ignoring of presented arguments and outvoting without argumentation that culminated with a violent incident. This report presents this event in a separate section.

B. Research methodology

The Discourse Quality Index (DQI) enables each speech act to be coded by several main characteristics:

- Level of argumentation
- Level of respect towards other MPs and theirs arguments
- Readiness and openness for changing the positions under the force of better arguments brought in the debate
- Content of justification or to whose benefits and costs refers the speaker
- Interruption or constraints towards speakers
- Use of inappropriate or abusive speech



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The monitoring focused on the following working bodies of the Assembly:

- Plenary sessions
- Committee on constitutional issues
- Finances and budget committee
- Committee on the political system and inter-ethnic relations
- Committee on election and appointment issues
- Committee on European affairs
- Standing inquiry committee for protection of civil freedoms and rights
- Legislative committee
- Committee on local self-government

After each monitoring month, through monthly reports, the public will be informed about the main findings from the monitoring of the quality of debate in the Assembly. Separate reports are also published on the media reporting on the work of the Assembly.

C. Political context

According to the Constitution the Assembly holds the legislative power and is consisted of 123 seats. The Members of the Parliament (MPs) are directly elected based on proportional electoral system with a mandate of 4 years. At the last early parliamentary elections conducted in April 2014, VMRO – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) won 61 mandates, and their coalition partner with whom they formed the government the Democratic Union for Integration won 19 seats. Citizens Option for Macedonia (GROM) and the National Democratic Rebirth (NDP), each have one mandate each.

Since the beginning of the monitoring until the publication of the Second report most of the MPs from the main opposition coalition led by the party Social-Democratic Union for Macedonia (SDSM) that won 34 mandates on the elections boycotted the work of the Assembly.



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Following the incident at the session of the Finances and budget committee on 26 August, seven MPs from the DPA boycotted the work of the Assembly. In this period the main opposition was consisted of three MPs from the opposition coalition led by SDSM who decided not to boycott the Assembly.

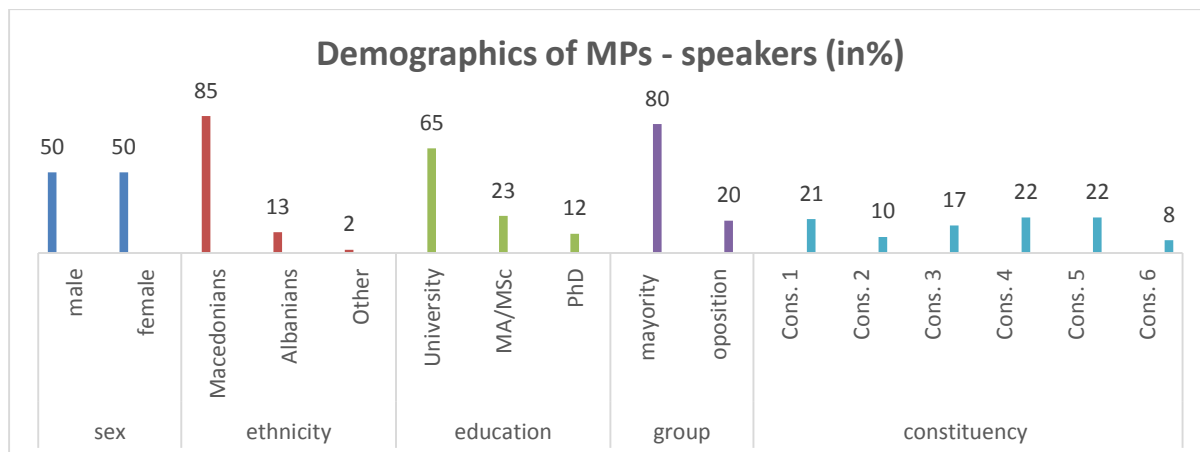
D. Findings from the monitoring (25 August – 30 September)

The report covers the debate in the Assembly in the period from 25 August to 31 September. It includes total of 524 act of speeches of participants on 21 parliamentary sessions, of which 10 are plenary and 11 sessions of parliamentary committees. Four of those are sessions of the Finances and budget committee, two of the Legislative committee, two of the Committee on local self-government, two of the Committee on the political system and inter-ethnic relations and one of the Committee on constitutional issues.

From these speeches, 338 belong to MPs and 184 to other outside participants in the work of the Assembly like government ministers, representatives from ministries, state and public institutions. The participants made their speeches on total of 96 topics from the agenda of the Parliament. The report refers only to the speech act of MPs.

The demographic characteristics of the speakers are the following:

- Sex: 50% male, 50% female
- Ethnicity: 85% Macedonians, 13% Albanians
- Education: 65%, University, 23% MA/MSc, 12% PhD.





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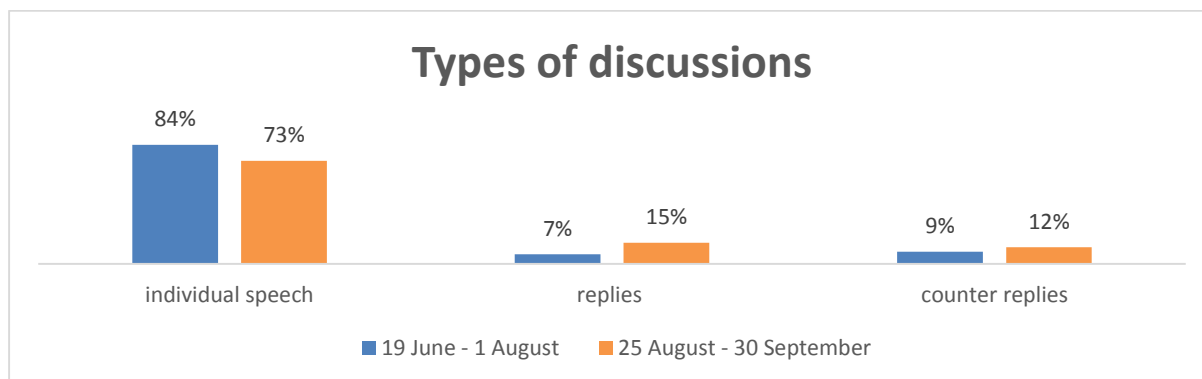
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In this monitoring period an increase of the number of speeches by female MPs is noticeable. They were more active, taking in regard that the female MPs represent one third of the total number of MPs, while at the same time discussion of women MPs accounts 50% of all discussions. Accordingly, every male MP in average has spoken 6 minutes, and every female MP 5 minutes.

Due to the current context in which the Assembly works, most of the speakers (80%) belong to the ruling coalition. Compared to the first monitored period we registered 8% growth of the share in the discussions by opposition MPs. In the period covered with this report, after the decision to boycott the Assembly by the members of DPA, the only opposition in the Parliament was consisted by only three MPs.

I. Type of speech and interaction

The monitoring in the second period showed slightly larger interaction between the MPs during the parliamentary debates. Out of the total number of discussions, 73% were individual speeches, 15% replies and 11% counter-replies. That indicates that the MPs responded or commented over the arguments of other speakers 9% more often compared to the first period when the replies were 7% and the counter-replies 9% of all acts of speech. The female MPs gave 51% of the replies and 88% of the counter-replies.

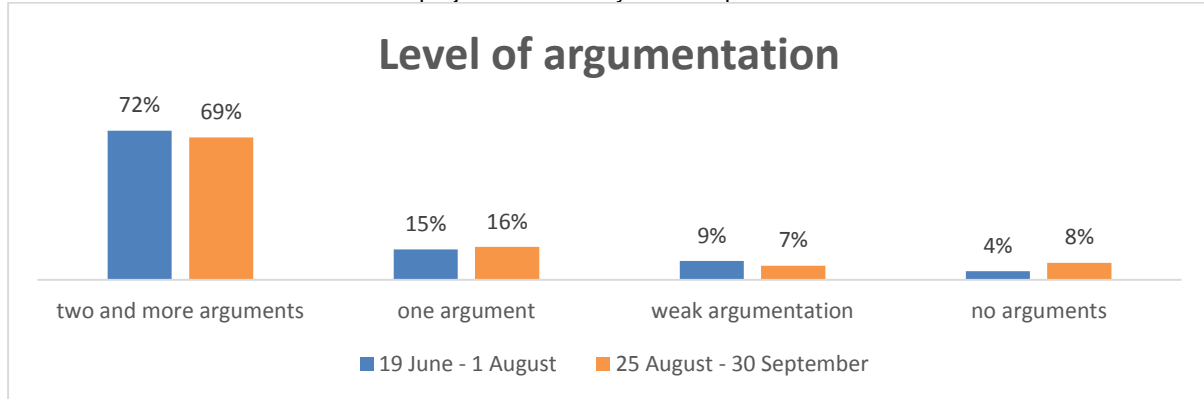


II. Level of argumentation

In the monitoring period 69% of the MPs speeches used 2 or more arguments to justify their positions. In 16% of speeches there was one argument. In 7% the argumentation was weak and in 8% the MPs did not justify their position with arguments at all.

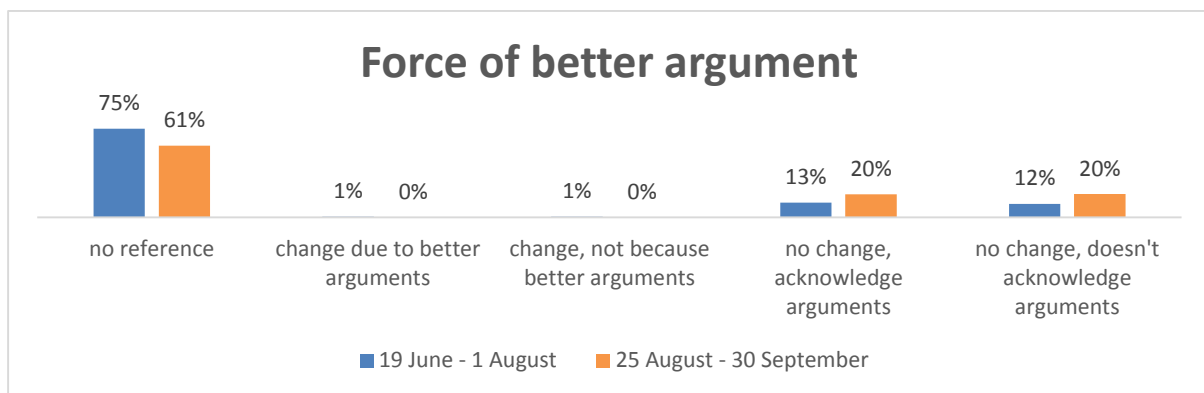


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III. Force of better argument

The monitoring showed that the MPs in parliamentary debates addressed to arguments of other participants in the debate more frequently than in the previous monitoring period. However, still 60% of speeches did not mention or refer to other arguments, which is still 15% less than in the previous monitoring period when this percent was 75. In 20% of discussions MPs acknowledged the worthiness of others arguments but did not change their position as result of the “force of a better argument”. Also in 20% of speeches the speakers did not change their positions nor acknowledged the worth of presented arguments by others. In this period there was not a case when an MP indicated change in the position or standpoint because of better arguments or for any other reasons.



IV. Respect for other MPs and their arguments

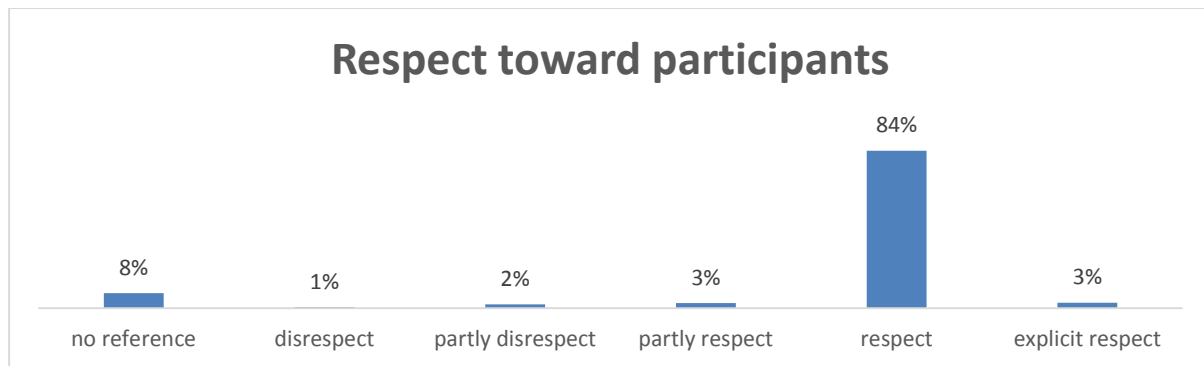


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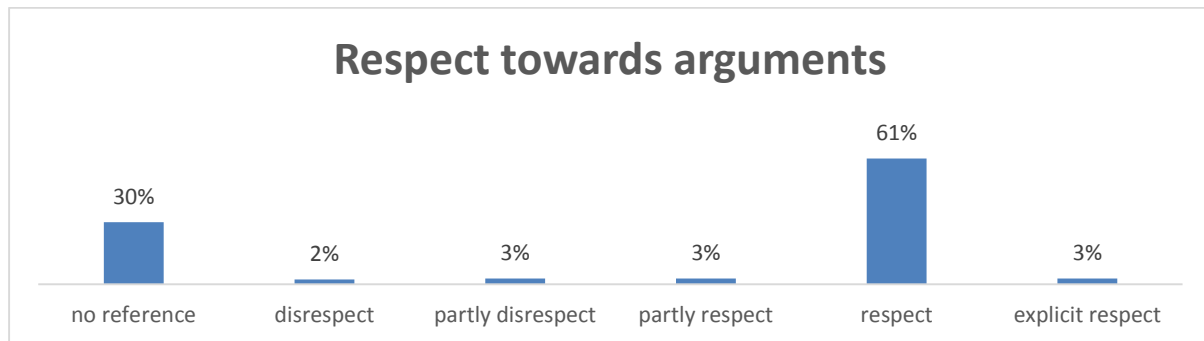
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Excluding the incident and the polarized atmosphere on the two sessions of the Finances and budget committee on 25th and 26th August, the MPs mostly showed respect towards other MPs and participants during discussions. In 84% of speeches the MPs showed basic respect towards others participants and in 3% showed explicit respect to other participants. In 2 cases MPs openly showed disrespect towards other MPs, and in 5% of discussions showed partial disrespect.



In 61% of speech acts MPs showed respect towards speeches of other speakers which is 13% less than in the previous monitoring period. Explicit respect was noted in 3% of cases and in 30% MPs did not show any reference to other MPs arguments. In 3% of discussions, speakers showed disrespect towards other MPs arguments.



V. Content of justifications of arguments and interruptions

A large majority of all speech acts, 87%, use benefits and costs for all citizens as main referential points of their arguments. In 4% they justify their argument through reference to their own group. To

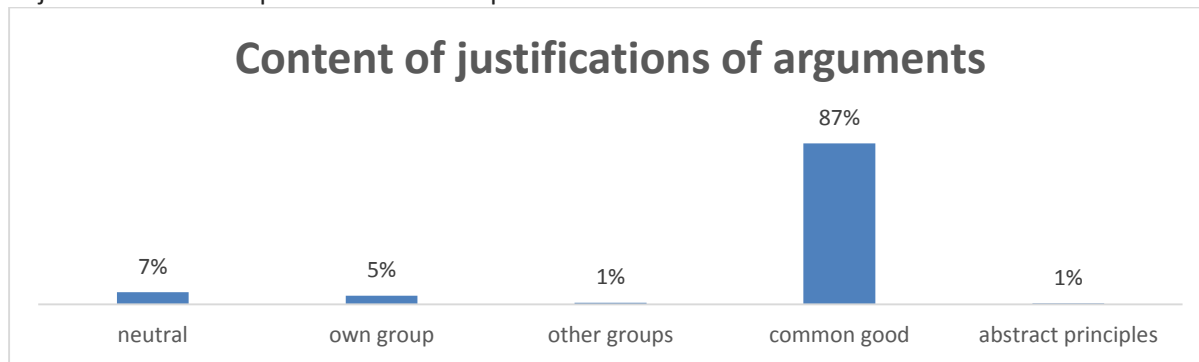


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abstract principles as social justice, peace, equality, quality of life, etc. the MPs refer only on two cases. In just 1% of acts of speech short interruptions were notified.



VI. Abusive speech and violent incident in the Finances and budget committee

Participants in monitored parliamentary sessions refrained from use of offensive or abusive language except for the two sessions of the Finances and budget committee (25 and 26 August). Generally, in 99% of speech acts use of offensive or abusive speech was not registered.

So far, the overall record of the discussion at the session from its beginning and until the incident has not been made public. Therefore it was not possible to code the speeches according the Discourse Quality Index and to provide complete analysis for the discussion on 26th August before the occurrence of the violent incident.

The Parliamentary channel of the Macedonian radio-television is responsible for recording and broadcasting the video materials from the parliamentary sessions. The Channel broadcasted shortened video from the session of the Committee for financing and budget where the material from the beginning of the session and until the incident was cut.

On this session on 26th August after the discussion on one of the proposed amendments submitted by the opposition DPA a fight broke out between the MPs from DPA and DUI. The impression from the monitoring is that the incident was a culmination of the polarized atmosphere which was created in the committee on the previous session the day before (25 August).

On August 25, a total of 13 speeches were presented at the session, 10 by MPs of the DPA, and three by the representative of the Ministry of Finance, and none by MPs from the parliamentary majority.



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In four of this speeches, the speakers justified their positions with 2 and more than 2 arguments. In three speeches they presented 1 argument and in one case the argumentation was weak. In two speeches they have not presented any arguments.

However, despite the arguments that explain their positions in two of the speeches offensive and inappropriate language was noted. Further, in one case one speaker showed personal disrespect toward participant fellow MP. In two cases speakers expressed partial disrespect or in larger parts of their speeches directed attacks towards other MPs and to a lesser extent were neutral. In three speeches the MPs were mostly neutral towards other participants, and to a lesser part were verbally attacking the personality of other participants on the session.

Three remaining acts of speech belong to the representative of the Ministry of finance with a total duration of 38 seconds. They are consisted by a brief statement that the proposed amendments are unacceptable without any other explanation and argumentation. The MPs from the parliamentary majority have not explained their position on any of the presented amendments.

The situation also repeated in the part of the session that followed after the incident. Without the opposition MPs from DPA who refused to continue their presence on the session after the fight, the majority overruled 78 amendments proposed by the opposition without any discussion and argumentation.

According to the theory of deliberative democracy the offensive and abusive speech and the outvoting without argumentation are preconditions that prevent creation of constructive discussion. Such behavior prevent exchange and evaluation of arguments through which the MPs contribute to creation and development of better laws and public policies in favor of the common good and public interest.

The offensive, abusive speech and personal attacks lead to creation of hostile atmosphere where the rational evaluation of the arguments brought by the participants become impossible. The outvoting without argumentation creates an image of demonstration of force which also discourages discussion and deprive the public from rational explanation why the arguments were not good enough to be considered.

E. CONCLUSIONS:



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- The discussion in the Assembly during the second monitoring period (25 August – 30 September) was characterized by individual speeches with slightly more frequent interaction between MPs compared to the first monitoring period (19 June – 1 August)
- The female MPs have considerably increased their share in the discussions.
- The debate on most of the legislation remained generally weak and did not allow to challenge and test the validity and viability of the prepared and presented arguments by the MPs. Therefore the public was deprived of different arguments and points of view which should enable creation of better decisions in favor of the common good and public interest.
- Most of the discussions that were subject to the monitoring were justified by 2 or more arguments.
- MPs in large extent did not show interest for arguments of other speakers, nor readiness for changing their positions due to better arguments presented in the debate.
- The MPs just in few cases used forms of inappropriate, offensive or abusive language.
- The use of offensive and abusive language, as well as the personal disqualifications used in the debate by opposition MPs, together with the outvoting without argumentation by the majority MPs are possible factors for the incident that happened during the session of the Committee for financing and budget on 26th August.

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