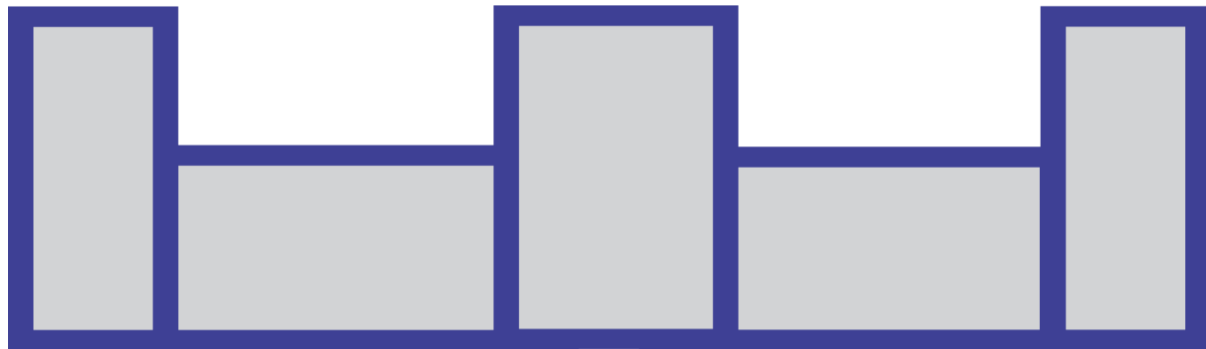




THIRD MONITORING REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF THE DEBATE IN THE PARLIAMENT



PARLIAMENT WATCH

**Strengthening Political Debate
and Deliberative Discourse**

OCTOBER – 2014



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Third Monitoring Report on the Quality of the Debate in the Parliament (October)

The Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis” – Skopje (IDSCS) and the Institute for Central-Eastern and Balkan Europe (IECOB) are monitoring the quality of the debates in the Assembly. The monitoring started in June 2014 and it is part of the project “Parliament Watch! Strengthening the political debate and deliberative discourse” that is 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

This report covers the monitoring period 1 -31 October 2014 and it includes 11 parliamentary sessions. The main conclusions in this Third report are that the discussion about the legislation remains weak, but the MPs had little more interaction compared to the previous monitoring periods 19 June – 31 July and 25 August – 30 September.

The increased participation of women MPs is credited for most of the replies and counter-replies and, as a result, for the deepening of discussion on legislative proposals. The increased interaction is

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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reflected in the growing number of replies and counter-replies on part of the legislative proposals. That allowed the public to get views from different angles on several topics.

The topics that attracted most attention of MPs and were most discussed in October were the Amended draft Budget for 2015, the session for parliamentary questions (first in this composition of the Assembly), the European Commission Progress Reports for 2014, amendments to Energy Law and amendments to Law for technological and industrial zones.

Most of other topics in the parliamentary agenda passed with small and one-sided or without any discussion.

Therefore, the public was deprived once again of a quality debate on large part of the legislations. At the same time, 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 this monitoring period is that the MPs from the main opposition block lead by SDSM continue with the boycott of the Assembly. Besides, for the period 1-20 October 2014 the work of the Assembly was boycotted by the opposition MPs from the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA). On 20 October, MPs from DPA resumed their parliamentary work and activities.

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

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



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- Use of inappropriate or abusive speech

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 is informed about the main findings from the monitoring of the quality of debate in the Assembly. Separate reports are also regularly published on the media reporting on the work of the Assembly.

C. POLITICAL CONTEXT

According to the Constitution, the Parliament holds the legislative power and it is consisted of 123 seats. Elected through a proportional electoral system, MPs held a mandate of 4 years. At the last early parliamentary elections conducted in April 2014, Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) won 61 mandates, and formed the government the Democratic Union (DPA) that won 19 seats. Citizens Option for Macedonia (GROM) and the National Democratic Rebirth (NDP), won one mandate each. NDP MP, Mirsada Emini Asani accepted the mandate despite the party's decision to boycott the Assembly and joined the parliamentary group of DUI.

Since the beginning of the monitoring until the publication of this 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. Following the incident at the session of the Finances and budget committee on 26 August, seven MPs from the DPA also decided to boycott the work of the Assembly. However, on 18 October, DPA party authorities decided to terminate the boycott. From 20 October the DPA MPs resumed their presence and work in the



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Assembly. In the period from 1 to 20 October the main opposition on parliamentary session only consisted of three MPs from the opposition coalition led by SDSM who decided not to boycott the Assembly.

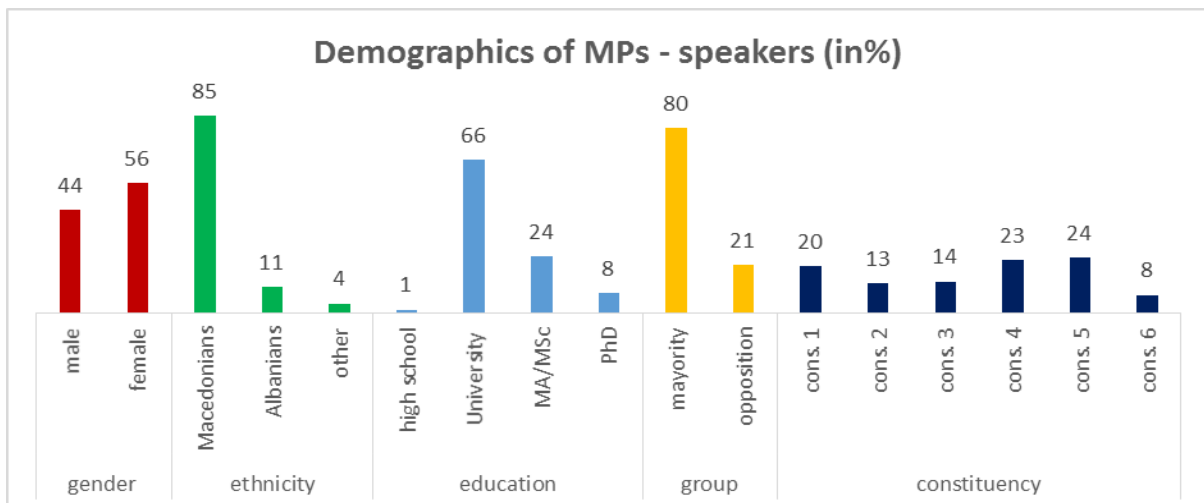
D. FINDING FROM THE MONITORING (October)

The report covers the debate in the Assembly in the period from 1 to 31 October. It includes a total of 417 act of speeches of participants on 11 parliamentary sessions, of which 8 are plenary and 3 sessions of parliamentary committees. The latter divide in one session of the Committee on European affairs, one of the Legislative committee and one of the Committee on the political system and inter-ethnic relations.

From the recalled speeches, 297 belong to MPs and 120 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 38 topics from the agenda of the Assembly. The report refers only to the speech act of MPs.

The demographic characteristics of the speakers in October are the following:

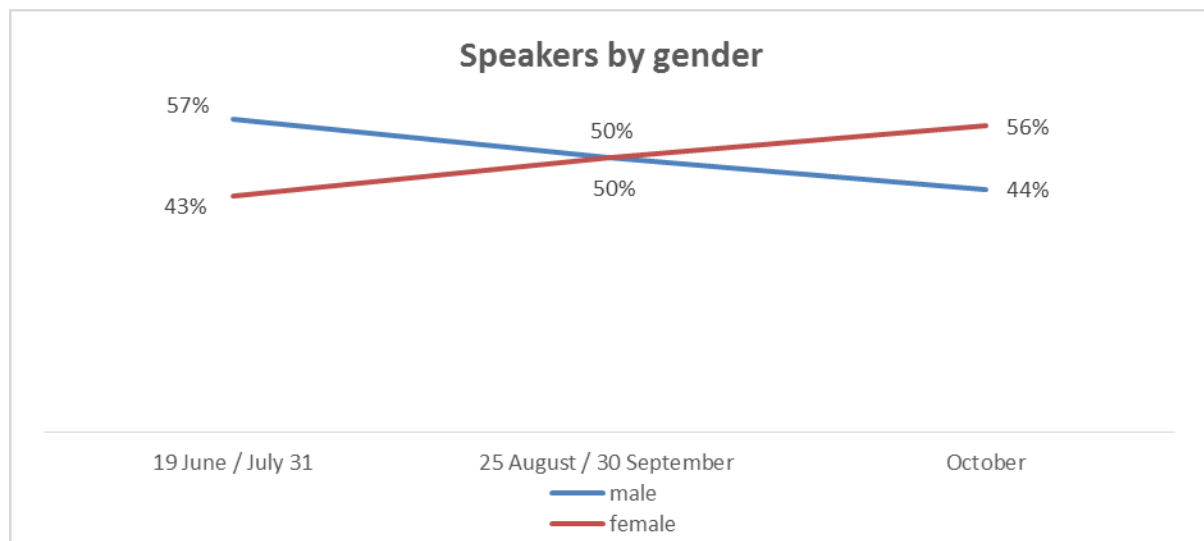
- Sex: 56% female, 46% male
- Ethnicity: 85% Macedonians, 11% Albanians, 4% other
- Education: 66% University, 24% MA/MSc, 8% PhD



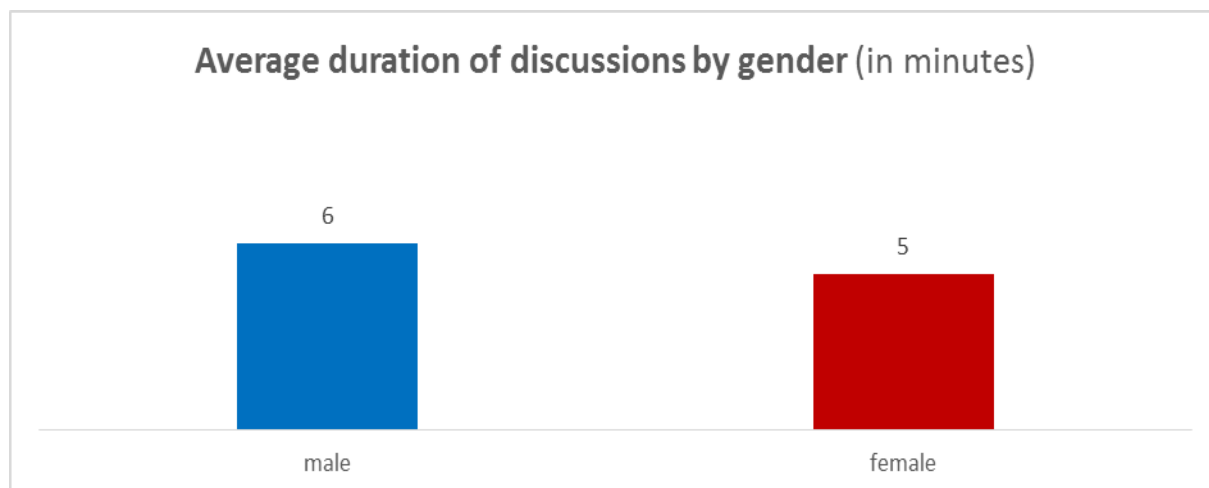


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The participation of female MPs in discussions on parliamentary sessions continued to increase in October. Although women are 35% of all active MPs in the Assembly, they were particularly active and accounted for 56% of all discussions on the monitored sessions.



Accordingly, every male MP in average has spoken 6 minutes, and every female MP 5 minutes.



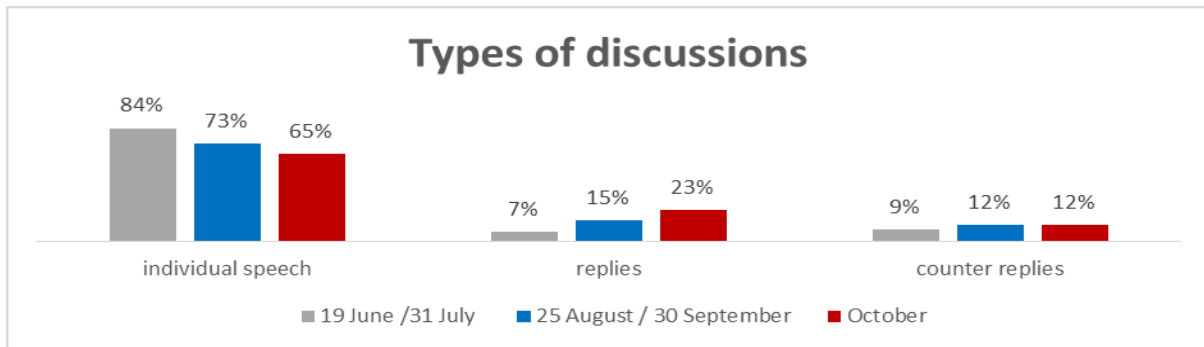


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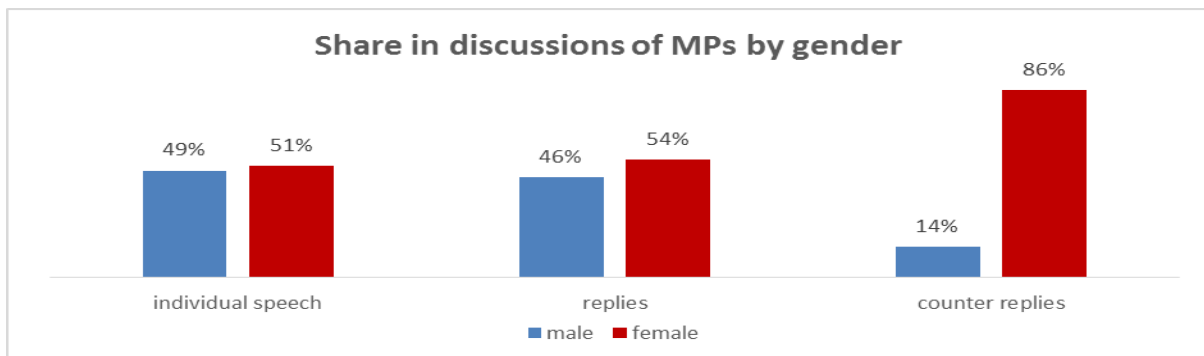
Due to the current context in which the Assembly works, most of the speakers (80%) belong to the ruling coalition. Compared to previous monitored periods, no considerable changes are registered in the shares in the discussions by opposition MPs.

I. TYPE OF DISCUSSION AND INTERACTION

The monitoring in October showed increase in the interaction between the MPs during the parliamentary debates compared to previous periods (19 June-31 July and 25 August – 30 September). Out of the total number of discussions, 65% were individual speeches, 23% replies and 12% counter-replies. That indicates that the MPs in October responded or commented over the arguments of other speakers 8% more often compared to the previous period, and 16% more than in the first monitoring period. This was partly due to the first session for parliamentary questions where the questions and answers that MPs and ministers exchanged were coded as replies.



In this period it is noticeable that female MPs were more active accounting 51% of speeches, 54% of replies and 86% of counter-replies.

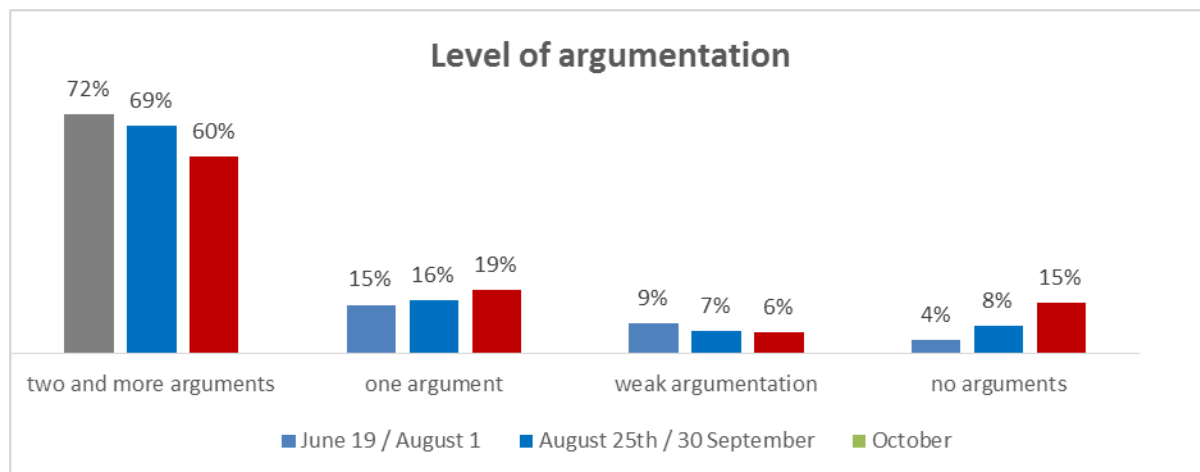




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II. LEVEL OF ARGUMENTATION

In this monitoring period the MPs in 60% of discussions used 2 or more arguments to justify their positions. In 19% of speeches there was one argument. In 6% the argumentation was weak and in 15% the MPs did not justify their position with arguments at all. In general, in October the level of argumentation was relatively lower compared to previous monitoring periods. The largest gap is notified in increasing percent of discussions without argumentation (15%) compared to 8% in August-September and 4% in June-July which partly can be contributed to the plenary session for parliamentary questions where the MPs headed questions to ministers.

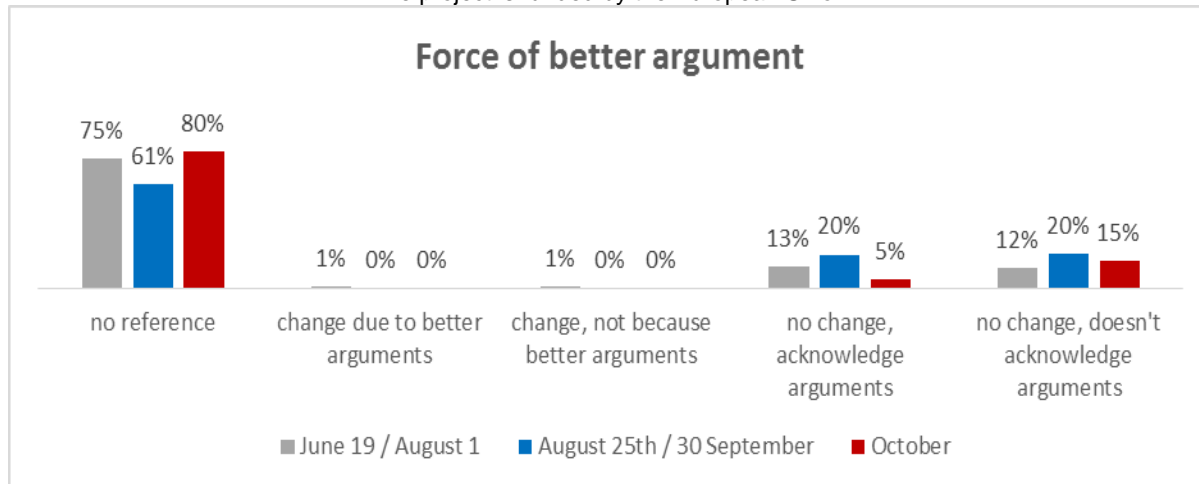


III. FORCE OF BETTER ARGUMENT

The monitoring in October did not show that any MP indicated change in the position or standpoint because of better arguments of other speakers or because of any other reason. Contrary, there was increase in the percent of discussions where the MPs did not refer at all to arguments of their colleagues. That was the case in 80% of discussions - i. e. 19% more than in the previous monitoring period when this was the case in 61%. In 5% of discussions MPs acknowledge the value of arguments brought by other speakers but did not change their position. In 15% of discussions MPs did not acknowledge the value of others arguments and remained on their positions.

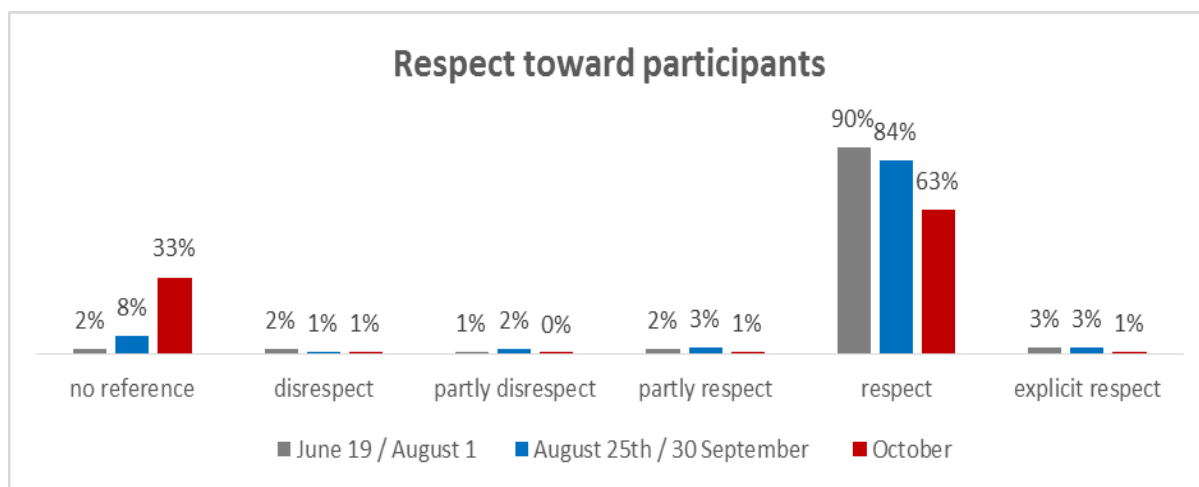


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IV. RESPECT TOWARD OTHER MPs

In October, speakers expressed in their discussions basic respect towards other participants on parliamentary sessions, but not like in the previous periods. In 63% of discusser participants which is 21% less than previous. On the other side, the discussions where speakers did not refer to other participants increased and reached 33% comparing to 8% in the previous period. In 1% of discussions speakers expressed disrespect toward other participants on sessions.



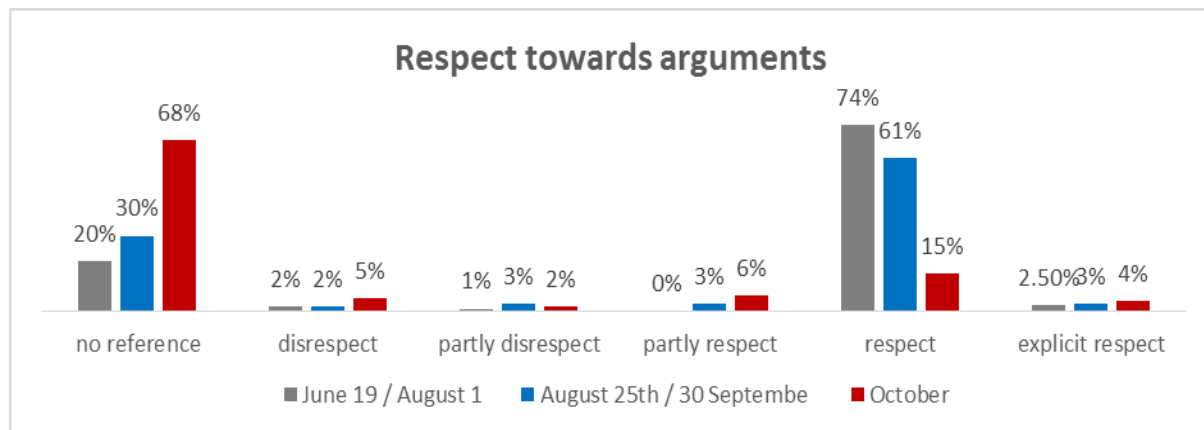


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V. RESPECT TOWARD ARGUMENTS

In October the MPs on the monitored sessions showed less willingness to express respect toward arguments of other speakers compared to the previous period (25 August-30 September). They expressed respect in 15% of discussions - i. e. 46% less than the previous period, when that was noted in 61% of discussions. Explicit respect was noted in 4% of discussions. In 2% speakers showed partial disrespect toward arguments of other speakers which means that in larger part of their discussions they expressed disrespect toward standpoints of other speakers and in smaller part were neutral. Complete disrespect towards other arguments was noted in 5% of speech acts. In 6% of discussions was noted partial respect which means that speakers in larger part were neutral, but in smaller part showed disrespect toward arguments of other participants. Most of discussions with elements of disrespect toward arguments were noted on the plenary session when the topic on the agenda was the Amended draft Budget for 2015.

In October the MPs more often refrained from expressing themselves against/ in favor of arguments of other speakers compared with previous period. In 68% of discussions they did not refer at all to arguments brought by other speakers compared to 30% in the previous period. The plenary session for parliamentary questions was the place where the MPs most frequently had no reference to arguments of other speakers (72%).



VI. CONTENT OF JUSTIFICATION OF ARGUMENTS AND INTERRUPTION

The large majority of speech acts (76%) uses benefits and costs for citizens as main referential points of their arguments. In 13% of cases they justify their argument through reference to their own

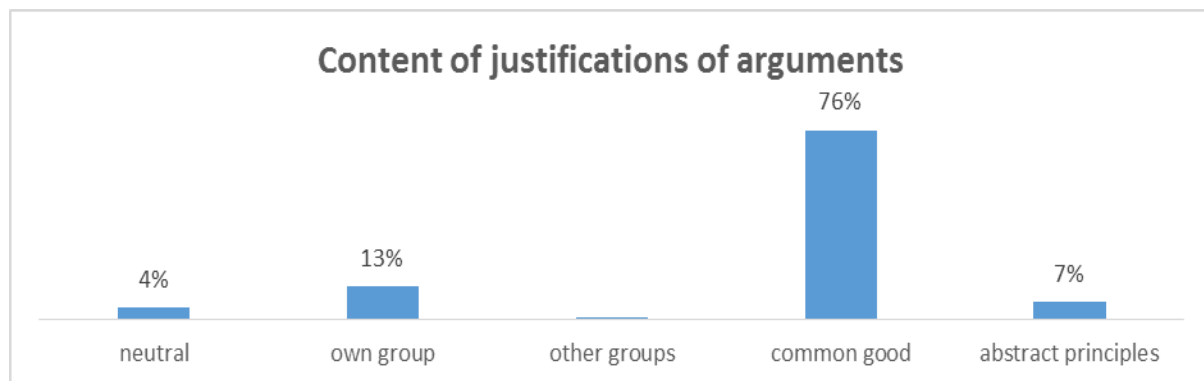


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group. In 7% of cases, MPs refer to abstract principles such as, among the others, social justice, peace, equality, quality of life Short interruptions were notified only in 1% of acts of speech.



VII. ABUSIVE SPEECH

The participants on monitored parliamentary sessions in October in general refrained from using offensive or abusive statements. In 98% of speech acts, the use of offensive or abusive speech was not registered at all. In this period none of the speakers constrained was constrained to express his/her own arguments.

CONCLUSIONS:

- The discussion in the Assembly during the third monitoring period (1 – 31 October) was in largest part characterized by individual speeches with slightly more frequent interaction reflected in the increased number of replies and counter replies between MPs compared to the previous monitoring periods (19 June – 1 August and 25 August – 30 September)
- Female MPs have considerably increased their share in the discussions and are accounted for deepening the discussions thanks to the fact that they gave most of the replies and counter replies on monitored sessions.
- The discussion on larger part of legislation remains 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 the creation of better decisions in favor of the common good and public interest.



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- Most of the discussions that were subject to the monitoring were justified by 2 or more arguments. The percent of those acts of speech slightly decreased compared to previous months, while increased the percent of discussions with one argument together with the percent of discussions in which speakers did not present any argument.
- 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.
- In few cases (2%) MPs used inappropriate speech.

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