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Metka Kuhar & Andraž Petrovc̃ic̃

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# THE QUALITY OF PARLIAMENTARY DELIBERATION: THE CASE OF THE FAMILY CODE DEBATES IN THE SLOVENIAN PARLIAMENT

**Metka Kuhar and Andraž Petrovčič**

*Using content analysis on a sample of 525 statements from the Slovenian Parliament we introduce the selected aspects of (non-)deliberation in the debates on the Family Code in the 2009–2011 period, thereby elaborating the Discourse Quality Index: participation, justification of demands presented within the debates and (dis)respect. We explore which of the following factors were associated with the level of deliberation about the Family Code: the type of the parliamentary body, the type of the actor (political groups, civil society, the government), (non-)support for the proposed Family Code, the time of the statement with regard to individual parliamentary readings, the length of the statement and the gender of the speaker. The results showed that the debate on the Family Code in the Slovenian Parliament was characterised by a modest level of deliberation. In addition, the multiple classificatory analysis indicated that the Discourse Quality Index was significantly associated with the (non-)support variable, the length of the statement and the parliamentary body.*

**KEYWORDS** deliberation; Discourse Quality Index; Family Code; multiple classification analysis; parliament; content analysis

## Introduction

In increasingly pluralised society confronted with complex problems there is a need for harmonisation of various views. The empirical, theoretical and practical interest in participatory approaches, which promise the revitalisation of democratic practice, such as dialogue, deliberation, collaborative policy-making and deliberative public opinion polls, has been increasing since the 1990s. Dryzek (2000) termed this phenomenon “a deliberative turn” in the theories of democracy. Theories of deliberative democracy have become one of the main subjects of modern political theory because they emphasise inclusion, transparency and responsibility associated with social and political decision-making (Karpowitz and Raphael 2014).

A common understanding is that deliberation is a well-grounded, respectful and consensus-oriented debate on public issues (Gastil 2008; Steiner et al. 2004; Steiner 2012). Deliberation or deliberative quality is usually understood as the degree to which participants in a debate on some public issue reasonably argue their views, listen to each other, show respect for others and reflect on their own interests, viewing them from the perspective of their general applicability (Bächtiger and Steenbergen 2004, 1). While deliberation in informal public sphere has received considerable attention in the literature, as deliberative forums, often called mini-publics, which enable direct inclusion of civil

society and citizens in the debates about the issues of public significance (Dryzek 2000; Felicetti, Niemeyer, and Curato 2015; Grönlund, Bächtiger, and Setälä 2014; Niemeyer 2011) are very important as a legitimisation of political processes and decisions (Fishkin 1995; Pedrini 2014), deliberation in parliamentary debates has been less studied (Bächtiger and Steenbergen 2004; Lord and Tamvaki 2012; Roald and Sangolt 2011; Spörndli 2003; Steiner et al. 2004; Steiner 2012).

This study therefore focuses on the deliberative quality of debates in the Slovenian Parliament (SP). Deliberation in the parliamentary context was most often assessed using the Discourse Quality Index (DQI), developed on the basis of Habermas' discursive ethics and elements of other deliberative models (Steenbergen et al. 2003; Steiner et al. 2004; Bächtiger et al. 2009; Steiner 2012). The DQI measures equality of speakers in a debate, the level of justification, orientation towards the common good, (dis)respect, constructive politics (i.e. deliberative standards of type I), narration of stories and deliberative negotiations (i.e. type II deliberation).

We analyse the deliberative quality of the parliamentary debates of the Family Code (FC), which took place during the period 2009–2011 in the SP, and factors influencing the quality of debates, including the type of the parliamentary body (National Assembly, National Council, relevant Committee within the National Assembly), the type of the political actor (political group, civil society, governmental representative), his/her support for/rejection of the FC, the stage of the debate during which a specific statement was made, the length of the statement and the gender of the participant.

The debate about the FC was chosen because it has been controversial and highly divisive. The FC polarised the Slovenian public and political representatives by proposing the legal equalisation of same-sex and heterosexual partnerships.

This study is, to our best knowledge, the first analysis of deliberation on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) topic, and the first analysis of deliberation in the SP focusing on the deliberative standards in debates with the DQI. The quality of parliamentary discourse was previously addressed by Žagar (2011). He showed that in arguing their views and countering the opposing ones, coalition MPs (Members of Parliament) at the sessions of the National Assembly of Republic of Slovenia (NARS) in 1999 used fewer arguments than the opposition representatives. The opposition parties invested a great deal of effort to present their arguments and make them recognisable as arguments, but this does not automatically mean that their arguments were acceptable, relevant and sufficient (Žagar 2011).

In what follows we first present a short chronological overview of the legislative procedures related to the debates about FC in the SP. Next, drawing on prior literature, factors of deliberation in parliamentary debates are examined and applied to the case of the FC. Six potential factors are then empirically investigated on a sample of statements with content-related demands presented at the sessions on the FC in the SP. In the last part, the results and their substantial implications are discussed, limitations of this study are addressed and future directions for research are presented.

## The Legislative History of the Family Code in Slovenia

The FC entered the parliamentary procedure in 2010 with the debates taking place in the NARS,<sup>1</sup> the Committee for Labour, Family, Social Affairs and People with Disabilities (the Committee) and the National Council of the Republic of Slovenia (NCRS).<sup>2</sup> The NARS held

four regular sessions dedicated to the FC between 2 March 2010 and 13 June 2011 as well as an extraordinary session held on 2 September 2011. The modified version of the FC, which accommodated various adjustments, was passed with 43 yes votes to 38 no votes. The first three sessions were dedicated to first, second and third readings of the FC, while at the extraordinary session the MPs voted on the initiative to assess whether a referendum on the FC was constitutional.<sup>3</sup>

Within the framework of Session 19 dedicated to the FC, the Committee convened seven times between 29 June 2010 and 7 April 2011. The debates about the proposal lasted more than 50 hours altogether, and it was the longest debate ever held by any committee of the SP. The Committee approved the adjusted version of the disputed articles of the FC, according to which only a man and a woman could enter a marriage, while two men or two women could register a partnership. At the time of the FC debate (2010–2011), the Committee comprised 15 members. However, more than 20 other relevant actors from governmental and non-governmental organisations were invited to each session.

The FC was the subject of Session 24 of the NCRS held on 17 March 2010, and of extraordinary Session 32 held on 23 June 2011. At Session 24, the NCRS did not support further parliamentary debate on the FC, but its decision did not have a formal influence on the parliamentary procedure. At Session 32, a veto on the FC was rejected. On 1 September 2011, the Civil Initiative for Family and Children's Right, a passionate opponent to the FC, began to collect signatures for a referendum on the FC, which was held on 25 March 2012 with 54.55 per cent of the voters voting against the FC.

However, the political party United Left, supported by the coalition parties, submitted to the NARS amendments to the act regulating marriage and family relations in mid-December 2014. They proposed the wording "marriage is a partnership of a man and a woman" to be changed to "marriage is a partnership of two persons". This eliminated most discrimination against same-sex partners, but not all. For example, a woman who lives with a female partner who has a child is not recognised in parenthood. The amendment was passed with 51 yes votes to 28 no votes on 3 March 2015.

Afterwards, the civic coalition It's About Children (whose leadership was also behind the Civil Initiative for Family and Children's Rights) collected 80,581 signatures in support of a referendum on the law about marriage and family relations. The NARS decided not to call a referendum, so the proposer demanded a constitutional assessment of such a decision. In autumn 2015 the Constitutional Court decided to allow the referendum, which was carried out on 20 December 2015: 63.5 per cent of eligible voters cast their vote against a bill that defines marriage as a union of two adults.

### **Factors of Deliberation in Parliamentary Debates**

The influence of individual institutional determinants or factors related to individual debaters on deliberation in parliamentary debates was rarely researched in the past. Let us mention several of the most extensive and relevant studies in this respect. Bächtiger and Steenbergen (2004) as well as Steiner et al. (2004) analysed 52 parliamentary debates in Switzerland, the United States, Germany and the United Kingdom that took place during the late 1980s and the 1990s. The selected debates focused on "critical decision cases" (Bächtiger and Steenbergen 2004, 11). The study sought to establish the influence of the following institutional characteristics and issue attributes on individual deliberative

standards (on the level of justification, respect and constructive politics): consensual versus competitive systems, presidentialism versus parliamentarianism, strong versus weak veto players, whether the debate was public or not, the second chamber of parliament versus the first chamber and low versus high polarisation. Consensual systems, presidentialism, second chambers and the low level of polarisation around the topic enhance deliberation, or at least some of its aspects (Bächtiger and Steenbergen 2004).

Bächtiger and Hangartner (2010), using the same data although for only Switzerland and Germany, concentrated on 12 policy issues and elaborated on various predictors of just one deliberative standard—respect. They distinguish among four major pathways for linking deliberative ideals with the “real world of politics”: institutional, cultural, issue-specific and actor and partisan-centric (Bächtiger and Hangartner 2010, 610). Notably, they explored how respect is influenced by coalition arrangements, veto power, secrecy, consensus culture, issue polarisation, timing, government and opposition parties, chairpersons, gender, tenure and age. The results unveiled that coalition arrangements and non-public arenas, less polarised and less salient issues, as well as partisan strategies and status significantly led to more respectful interactions, while the effects of political culture and other individual characteristics were less clear-cut.

In addition, Lord and Tamvaki (2012) analysed 32 plenary debates of the European Parliament, assessing the influence of various aspects and issues of institutional nature (i.e. various content characteristics of argumentation, issue polarisation, speech length, qualified majority voting) on the quality of deliberation. Interestingly, they showed that the invoking of global human rights (cosmopolitan orientation) increases the likelihood of high deliberate standards in the European Parliament, almost as much as reference to EU values and norms, unlike the insignificant utility-based arguments. Likewise, greater time allocation on an issue, polarised issues and qualified majority voting topics result in greater quality of deliberation.

### **Factors of Deliberation in the Debates about the Family Code**

Drawing on past findings about the deliberative factors in parliamentary debates as well as specific historical, institutional and political circumstances in Slovenia which shaped the legislative process of the FC, we present and discuss the six factors that are suggested to be associated with the deliberation in debates about the FC in the SP.

In terms of the relationship between the type of the parliamentary body and deliberation, the function of the NCRS in Slovenia is to enhance the quality of the legislative procedure by ensuring a broader dialogue and a higher level of consensus (The National Council Act). Members of the NCRS are not appointed as party representatives, so they are not supposed to defend the interests of political parties (regardless of whether or not they are members) but the interests of various groups; for example, the school system, the economy, local interests and so forth. The only power that the NCRS has is to impose veto on a law passed by the NARS, but it does not prevent the NARS from revisiting the vetoed law. This is one of the reasons why the (ideal type) significance of the NCRS primarily lies in its ability to provide more professional and ethical assessments. Although Steiner et al. (2004) and Bächtiger and Steenbergen (2004) unveiled higher deliberation levels within second chambers compared with plenary sessions, this might not hold for the NCRS due to its relatively minor role and its “semi-chamber status”.

In addition to the representatives of political parties, the committees within the NCRS invite to their debates civil society actors and members of various state institutions (Ministries, Human Rights Ombudsman, etc.) The role of the committees is to study various remarks on the proposed law, harmonise them, make corrections if necessary and/or even propose amendments. The reason why we expect a lower level of deliberation in the committees than in the NCRS is that in addition to political party representatives, who have strong stances (in the example analysed here, the discrepancy between the coalition and opposition representatives was especially large), the committees invite to their sessions various polarised interested audiences—this also holds for the debates about the FC. The committees have a comparatively larger influence on the legislative procedure than the NCRS so, because of the limited role of the NCRS, lower polarisation in its debates might be expected.

Conversely, MPs in the NARS are generally *a priori* polarised. Therefore, they usually strategically defend the stances taken by their political party by criticising opposing stances (see Crouch 2000). Moreover, Žagar (2011) pointed out deficiencies in the argumentation of the coalition MPs, while the analysis of individual instances even revealed quite a frequent occurrence of disrespect (Flajšman 2009). Based on the aforementioned, we suggest that the type of the parliamentary body predicts the level of deliberation in statements.

The results of Žagar's (2011) study also inform us that the type of the actor is important for the understanding of deliberation in parliamentary debates. According to his findings, civil society and opposition would resort to argumentation most frequently of all and they would strive to present their arguments as clearly as possible (e.g. by backing their opposition to the FC with solid arguments), while the government spokespersons and the coalition would rely on their power (voice majority in the NARS). Moreover, taking into account the analysis of the FC debates carried out by Vezovnik (2015), it could be expected that civil society and opposition would present more arguments and use more references to sources, but they would also express a lower degree of respect in their argumentation. Therefore, we inspect whether the type of the actor is associated with the level of deliberation in statements.

The qualitative analysis of statements we analysed in our study showed that the opponents of the FC understood same-sex orientation as something unnatural, so we expected a lower level of respect on their part (Vezovnik 2015). The opponents also held stronger stances, leading one to expect their lower adherence to deliberation standards (Vezovnik 2015). Hence, we suggest that there is a difference between the supporters and opponents of the FC in terms of the level of deliberation.

The fourth investigated factor takes into account the course of parliamentary debates during the legislative procedure. It can be expected that the level of deliberation might vary during the course of the debate because negotiations are expected to evolve through several different phases; for example, starting with the goal of common understanding but, due to the irreconcilable differences, receding to strategic action (Holzinger 2001). Different phases differ in deliberation quality (Bächtiger et al. 2009). Further, since argumentation might be more extensive during the initial phase because it has been prepared in advance, we assess whether the time of the statement is associated with the level of deliberation in statements.

Furthermore, it is more likely that speakers in longer utterances show higher levels of deliberation, because it is expected that in moderated debates they support their claims

with more numerous and complex forms of argumentation as well as rely on more argumentative sources. Such observation leads us to hypothesise that the length of statements is associated with the level of deliberation in statements.

Although Childs (2004, 11) argued that gender may not affect deliberation because the pressures of the parliamentary system—institutional and partisan—are so powerful that any differences between men and women wither away, there are many claims that women have a different approach to the political process. For instance, Mansbridge (1996) has directly argued that women are more inclined to deliberative processes than men. In his opinion, the participatory and consultative style of deliberation and the ability to empathise is more characteristic of women. In addition, authors argue that women are more inclined to “extended” forms of deliberation such as storytelling (Polletta and Lee 2006). At the same time, deliberations in which the emphasis is solely on rationality put women in a disadvantaged position (Sanders 1997; Young 1996). This leads us to investigate whether the speaker’s gender is associated with the level of deliberation in statements.

## Methods

### *Unit of Analysis and Sampling*

A quantitative content analysis (Berelson 1952) was carried out using a coding scheme on a sample of statements containing content-related demands presented at the sessions of the NARS, the Committee and the NCRS and related to the FC. A statement denotes a speech act between one and the next speaker, beginning and ending with a clear-cut pause—either because the speaker is interrupted by another speaker or the moderator, or because he/she himself concluded the speech act.

We analysed statements that carried content-related demand, which herein denotes an individual or group proposal as to which decisions/proposals should be accepted and which should not and which are related to the content of the FC and not to procedural issues and so forth. When analysing the deliberative standards related to the argumentation/justification, we focused on the first content-related demand in a statement (albeit a single statement might have contained several demands), whereas (dis)respect was analysed in the context of the content of the statement as a whole. The approach to code only the justification of demands (and not of whole statements) follows Steenbergen et al. (2003), who suggested that relevant aspects of potential argumentation which might affect the quality of deliberation in speech acts/statements are only those which directly support a demand of the speaker,<sup>4</sup> while (dis)respect might also exist in statements which do not enclose justification of even demands. Further, we focused only on the first content-related demand in a statement informed by the research in the field of argumentation and/or rhetoric suggesting that the key argument(s)—in our case linked to a demand—are/should be present at the beginning of a statement (for example, Žagar 1997). In addition, it is likely to expect that the first demand is usually the most important to the speaker and, thus, also most supported by a justified line of reasoning.<sup>5</sup>

The preliminary analysis showed that moderators’ statements were primarily of the procedural nature, so we excluded them from the analysis. Nevertheless, the total number of remaining statements was 1074 and because this exceeded our resources in this study, we decided on sampling. We included statements made during all relevant

sessions so that we could also establish how the quality of deliberation evolved through the various stages of the legislative procedure.

Hence, as regards the debates of the NARS and the Committee, we applied systematic sampling, excluding one in three statements of (non-moderator) participants in the debate (in every individual session), with the first statement in the NARS and the Committee selected randomly. As regards debates of the NCRS, we decided to analyse every statement containing a demand, because the total number of statements during the two Council's sessions was small. The final sample consisted of 735 statements altogether.

In the next step we identified demands within the selected sample of statements. Every statement was reviewed by two researchers who pinpointed the first content-related demand in the statement. If the statement did not include any content-related demand, it was excluded from the sample. If the two reviewing researchers disagreed with each other's assessment, the third researcher was asked to review the statement and then all three harmonised their views. The final sample consisted of 525 statements with content-related demands.

### *Coding of Statements*

In order to verify the reliability of coding, every statement was coded by three out of seven trained coders. Everyone coded 225 statements on average. The reliability of the coding was assessed using  $AC_1$  statistics (Gwet 2014), which can be used for variables on the nominal scale and is especially suitable for asymmetric frequency distribution. Based on the results of such analysis, only those variables that proved reliable were included in the analysis.<sup>6</sup> The final score for each reliably coded variable was determined by the majority score given by the three coders.

### *Measures*

*Discourse Quality Index.* To assess the level of deliberation the coding scheme included refined measures of the deliberation standards of types I and II, which had been developed and presented by Steenbergen et al. (2003) and Steiner et al. (2004), and afterwards redesigned by Bächtiger et al. (2009) and Steiner (2012). Notably, the DQI in this study was composed of the following variables: participation, the level of justification, common good orientation, reference to the sources and (dis)respect.

However, the coding scheme developed as part of this study also aimed to improve the reliability and validity of the DQI measure for its application in quantitative content analysis, considering the open theoretical questions and guidelines concerning individual dimensions and characteristics of deliberative processes, as well as the reported conceptual deficiencies of the existing DQI in prior research. We inspected and confronted its various measures. In addition, we also considered the operationalisation of further specific individual dimensions of deliberation (Dahlberg 2002; Jaansen and Kies 2004; Stromer-Galley 2007).

In accordance with Steenbergen et al. (2003), participation was measured through the presence of interruptions ( $AC_1 = 0.93$ ) on the part of speakers and moderators.

The level of justification was measured with the variable having six categories adapted from Steiner (2012). We attempted to give a precise definition of what qualified

as justification, and we provided relevant examples for each of the six categories. We defined justification as presenting the reasons or arguments for a specific demand put forward by the participant in the debate. The variable showed an adequate level of reliability ( $AC_1 = 0.69$ ) when its values were re-coded into three categories, which were as follows: 0 = “the author did not support his/her demand with any argument”; 1 = “the author used illustration as an argument for what should be done or should not be done”; and 2 = “the author supported his/her demand with at least one argument and the connection between the demand and the argument(s) was clear”.

When measuring orientation towards the common good, we drew on Steiner’s (2012) operationalisation but defined individual categories more precisely, including the so far non-articulated notion of “group” and how referring to one’s own group or other groups should be coded in relation to the common good and abstract principles. We therefore measured whether the speaker explicitly referred to the advantages and/or disadvantages for his/her own group, other group(s), the common good or abstract principles. Indicators referring to the advantages and/or disadvantages for other group(s) and to abstract principles were not coded reliably. Hence, only the categories of the own group (0 = “No”, 1 = “Yes”) and the common good (0 = “No”, 1 = “Yes”) were included in the analysis.

Drawing on Stromer-Galley (2007), we adapted (and included into the DQI) her measurement of the sources to which the speakers explicitly referred when presenting arguments for their first demand.<sup>7</sup> For statistical analysis, reliably coded indicators were re-coded into the new variable with three categories ( $AC_1 > 0.6$ ): 0 = “the speaker did not cite any source to support his/her demand”; 1 = “the speaker cited one source”; and 2 = “the speaker cited two or more sources”.

Respect denotes respect for other speakers and their (counter)arguments and inquiries. Indeed, this variable is used to measure the instances of (dis)respect. We elaborated this concept both theoretically and operatively.<sup>8</sup> We created a derived variable based on indicators that measure various aspects and forms of disrespect. A statement was coded as “0 = disrespectful” if it contained at least one form of pejorative language, otherwise it was coded as 1 = “respectful”.

Following the formative measurement perspective on deliberation suggested by Bächtiger and Steenbergen (2004) in which the deliberation as a theoretical construct is conceptualised as a function or composite of its dimensions, the DQI was computed as the sum of values of the six variables (i.e. interruption, level of justification, orientation towards the own group and towards the common good, sources, respect) yielding a score between zero and eight with higher values representing higher deliberation quality of the statement. The DQI was approximately normally distributed with a median value of 4, a mean of 3.8 and a standard deviation of 1.1. The values ranged from zero to seven, indicating that none of the 525 statements in the sample obtained the maximum possible score of eight.

*Factors.* The actors were categorised as follows (Brezovšek and Haček 2012): representatives of political parties and parliamentary groups (henceforth “political groups”), representatives of interest groups (organised groups within the NCRS), non-governmental groups and civil initiatives (the latter participated in the Committee sessions) (henceforth “civil society”) and representatives of the government and state bodies (henceforth “the government”).<sup>9</sup>

The statements were divided into three groups depending on the time of occurrence, following the procedural logic of the SP which envisages several readings of the bill (Rules of Procedure of the NARS). The first time period covered first reading of the proposed FC in the NARS and the first debate on it in the NCRS. The second time period covered all of the seven debates in the Committee and the second reading in the NARS, and the third time period comprised the third reading in the NARS, the fourth (extraordinary) session on this topic in the NARS and the second debate in the NCRS.

As regards the length of statements, we divided them into four equally large groups. The first group comprised statements whose length was up to 161 characters, the second group comprised those whose length was 162–329 characters, the third those with 330–663 characters and the fourth those with more than 664 characters.

In establishing whether the speaker supported or was opposed to the FC, we relied on voting or explicit declarations by the speakers themselves. MPs and state advisors were categorised based on the voting results; the representatives of the government were categorised as supporters because they proposed the FC; and other participants in the Committee debates were categorised into one of the mentioned groups based on their affiliation with individual publicly known non-governmental organisation or initiative, or on the content of their statements during the debates.

## Results

The analysis showed that out of 525 statements only 35 (6.7 per cent) were interrupted. Forty-three statements (8.2 per cent) were not supported by any argument, 76 statements (14.5 per cent) contained only an illustration for the demand and 406 statements (77.3 per cent) contained at least one argument supporting the demand. In addition, in 21 statements (four per cent) the speakers referred to the advantages and disadvantages for their own group. A slightly higher proportion of statements (5.4 per cent) contained a reference to the common good. The speakers who presented an illustration or at least one argument to support their demand used explicit references to personal experience in 9.5 per cent of statements, personal competence in 3.1 per cent, scientific papers in 4.8 per cent, the mass media in 2.3 per cent, arguments or comments by other speakers in the same debate in 13.5 per cent, religious stances and convictions, and religious documents, tradition, “natural laws” and the like in 4.4 per cent of statements. This means that 378 out of 525 statements (72.0 per cent) did not contain any reference to a source, 117 (22.3 per cent) contained a reference to one source and 30 (5.7 per cent) contained references to two or more sources. Further, 107 statements were disrespectful (20.4 per cent) at least in one of the aspects analysed.

With reference to the DQI factors the results showed that 346 statements (65.9 per cent) were presented at the Committee debates, 133 (25.3 per cent) in the NARS and 46 (8.8 per cent) in the NCRS. The frequencies and percentages of statements made by various types of actors were as follows: 325 (61.9 per cent) political groups, 127 (24.2 per cent) civil society and 73 (13.9 per cent) the government. Advocates of the FC uttered 245 statements (46.7 per cent). Fifty-five (10.5 per cent) statements were made during the first reading of the FC, 377 (71.8 per cent) during the second reading and 93 (17.7 per cent) during the third reading or later. Females made 143 statements (27.2 per cent) compared with 382 (72.8 per cent) statements made by males.<sup>10</sup>

In order to investigate the six factors, multiple classificatory analysis (MCA) was run, which provides differences in average values for each category of a predictor variable that make the statistical effects of other predictors equal (Andrews, Morgan, and Sonquist 1969). Unlike simpler forms of other multivariate methods, MCA can handle predictors with no better than nominal measurements and interrelationships of any form among the predictor variables or between a predictor and dependent variable. In addition to the predicted averages, MCA also provides for each predictor variable an estimate of the standardised coefficient beta. The value of betas is comparable with the standardised regression coefficients in linear regression with two important differences. On one hand, the values of beta are calculated for each categorical variable, instead of for each category. On the other hand, contrary to the regression procedure, beta values do not express the direction of the influence but only estimate the size of the effect.

We generated a model where the DQI was entered into MCA as a dependent variable, while the six factors were defined as predictors. The model was statistically significant ( $F_{11,525} = 4.75$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) and showed a good fit with the data, with all predictors explaining 9.2 per cent of the variance of the dependent variable. As shown in Table 1, the results of MCA indicated that the DQI was significantly associated with the (non-)support variable ( $\beta = 0.117$ ;  $0.01 < p < 0.05$ ) and the length of the statement ( $\beta = 0.259$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), whereas the variable parliamentary body ( $\beta = 0.163$ ;  $0.05 < p < 0.1$ ) was only marginally significantly associated with the DQI after controlling for all other predictors in the model. Conversely, the gender of the speaker ( $\beta = 0.023$ ; not significant), the type of the actors ( $\beta = 0.012$ ; not significant) and the time of the statement ( $\beta = 0.116$ ; not significant) turned out not to be associated with the DQI, suggesting that there were no significant differences between adjusted (controlled for the statement characteristics in the model) predicted means of the DQI for categories of these variables. Accordingly, three out of six inspected factors were confirmed to be significantly associated with the DQI.

**TABLE 1**  
Multiple classification analysis of factors of the DQI

Variable	Categories	N	$\beta$	UPM	APM
Parliamentary body	Committee	346	0.163*	3.8	3.8
	NARS	133		4.0	3.9
	NCRS	46		4.2	4.4
Group type	Political groups	325	0.012	3.8	3.8
	Civil society	127		3.9	3.8
	Government	73		4.0	3.9
(Non-)support	Supporters—for	240	0.117**	4.0	4.0
	Opponents—against	285		3.7	3.7
Time of statement	First reading	55	0.116	3.9	3.9
	Second reading	377		3.8	3.9
	Third reading or later	93		4.0	3.6
Length of statement	161	132	0.259***	3.4	3.4
	162–329	131		3.8	3.8
	330–663	131		3.9	3.9
	664 or more	131		4.2	4.2
Gender	Male	382	0.023	3.8	3.9
	Female	143		3.8	3.8

Note:  $F_{11,525} = 4.75$ \*\*\*; adjusted  $R^2 = 9.2$  per cent. UPM, unadjusted predicted mean; APM, predicted mean adjusted for factors. \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $0.01 < p < 0.05$ , \* $0.05 < p < 0.1$ .

In addition, the adjusted predicted means of the DQI for the categories of corresponding three significant predictors were inspected. With reference to the parliamentary body, the results show that statements expressed in the NARS (Mean = 4.0) and the NCRS (Mean = 4.2) yielded higher values of the DQI than the statements uttered in the Committee (Mean = 3.8). Further, statements expressed by the supporters of the FC (Mean = 4.0) yielded higher values of the DQI than the statements of the opponents (Mean = 3.7). Finally, in terms of statement length, the comparison of adjusted means across the four categories indicated that the longer the statement, the higher the value of the DQI.

## Discussion

The main aim of this study was to explore which of the six factors that were derived from the literature on deliberation in parliamentary debates were associated with the level of deliberation in the debates about the FC in the SP. The factors were addressing various levels, from institutional (i.e. parliamentary body, type of the actor) to statement specific (i.e. "for" or "against" stance, the length of the statements, the time of its occurrence in the context of several readings) and participant specific (i.e. gender). The results showed that only the parliamentary body, (non-)support of the FC and the length of the statement were significantly associated with the DQI. Conversely, the type of the group to which the speaker belonged, the speaker's gender and the time of the statement within parliamentary readings were not significantly associated with the DQI in the studied statements. The results of MCA also indicated that on average statements within the NCRS and the NARS and statements by the advocates of the FC were more deliberative. Further, it was found that the level of deliberation increased with the increase in the length of a statement.

Focusing on the significant predictors, it is surprising that the statements raised in the NARS were significantly (albeit marginally) more deliberative than those in the Committee. Because civil society proved to be no less deliberative than political groups, we can explain this result in part by the fact that the debate was not broadcast on television and particularly that confrontations mainly take part in the Committee. In addition, debates in the NCRS were found to be more deliberative than those in the NARS. The NCRS is a representative body of various interest groups and does have the legislative power. Although it is composed of various interest groups, the topic in question did not directly relate to their (members') interests. This is probably what contributed to a higher level of deliberation. The higher level of deliberation expressed by the advocates of the proposal is also expected given their more moderate views.

Let us also comment on the non-significant predictors. Following Žagar (2011), who showed that coalition MPs in NARS argued their stances less than opposition MPs, it is not surprising that the government did not turn out to be more deliberative. On the contrary, the same level of deliberation in the statements of political actors and those of civil society representatives leads to the conclusion that civil society primarily supported the stances of its political representatives. However, an opposite interpretation would also be possible: that the argumentation on the part of political representatives, including the government, stemmed from the argumentation put forward by civil society. It is intriguing that the time of a statement was not related to deliberation, which indicates that justification and respect remained on the same (relatively low) level throughout the legislative procedure. Our analysis did not confirm the suggestion that deliberation is gendered. However, statements

made by women accounted for only one-quarter of the sample, pointing to their unequal representation even in matters concerning family concepts.

With reference to specific dimensions of the DQI, a few findings should be pointed out; first of all, an overall modest level of the DQI (Median = 4,  $M = 3$ ). Results related to the justification as a central dimension of DQI showed that almost one-quarter of statements (22.7 per cent) were not supported by an argument. Furthermore, the presence of an argument in itself does not automatically imply the quality of argumentation. Žagar (1997) provides examples of poor argumentation in the SP. He argues that the key characteristic of argumentation is rationality, meaning that the speaker argues his/her position, defends or rejects a stance in a rational manner. The addressee is expected to accept or reject a specific stance based on arguments and accordingly adapt future actions. However, it is not as simple as it may seem at first glance to judge what a rational argument is—especially in ethical and political debates (Ule 2009). In this regard, the limitations of the DQI have already been put forward (Steiner et al. 2004). In fact, the DQI seems to be limited to the procedural aspect of debates, while the issue of the quality of content remains in the background (Beste 2013). Another key indicator of deliberation is (dis)respect for other speakers, their views, and also for the issue under debate. We identified disrespect in approximately 20 per cent of statements, which is a rather large percentage.

Because the measuring instrument was adapted for the aims of this study, a direct comparison with prior studies is limited. Notably, only the frequency of interruptions and the level of justification could be directly compared with the results obtained by Steiner et al. (2004), Lord and Tamvaki (2012) and Roald and Sangolt (2011). All of these studies established similar or somewhat lower numbers of interruptions, although the variation in the percentages of statements not supported by an argument is quite high (15–35 per cent). Hence, the herein reported percentage of interruptions (23 per cent) places Slovenia in the group of “more” developed countries. Nevertheless, we should point out again that the use of argument in itself is just one aspect of the quality of argumentation. This was shown also by the qualitative analysis of arguments from a subsample of statements that were used in this study (Vezovnik 2015).

Such remaining questions and limitations of this study provide direction for the future. Because we did not analyse the entire universe of statements and content-related demands, this might have had implications for the generalisability of the findings. For example, even though systematically excluding every third statement from the sample allowed us to assess the characteristics of deliberation on the aggregated level in relation to the properties of statements and speakers, it considerably limited us in unveiling the dialogical aspect of the deliberation—in the sense of the development of deliberativeness through the interactional dynamics of speech acts between subsequent interlocutors. In particular, this might be an important topic of future research on the DQI within formal public spheres where the legal framework allows immediate replies to statements/demands of interlocutors. In the SP the sequence of participants’ speech acts in the debate follows a legal procedure laid down by the Rules of Procedure of the NARS, which concedes direct replies between interlocutors only during a very limited part of discussion related to the legislative procedure. In a similar manner, a further step could be to study the justification of all (and not only the first) content-related demands in the sampled statements. Moreover, the list of factors of the DQI in this study is obviously not exhaustive and could be expanded in future research. For instance, because not only the members of the NARS and NCRS were included in the analysis, we could not obtain information on the

education and age of all participants in the debate. For the same reason, the information on the length of MPs' term in office, their party affiliation and coalition versus government opposition affiliation was not included. Further, low inter-coding reliability prevented us from establishing deliberative standards with certain indicators (e.g. references to other groups, abstract notions/principles and constructive politics). Thus, further evidence for the validity of the measures is needed. Lastly, another possible topic for future research would be to address the problem of deliberation with qualitative methods, which could give better insight into the aspects of deliberation that cannot be studied with content analysis (e.g. contextual analysis, discursive analysis).

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## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## NOTES

1. The NARS is formally the highest representative and legislative body in Slovenia. It has 90 MPs appointed for a four-year term. The National Assembly comprises 20 committees and commissions whose role is to discuss the proposed laws, other acts and issues.
2. The NCRS is defined as a representative of social, economic, professional and local group interests and has 40 members. The term National Council is specific to Slovenia; the usual name of this body is "second chamber."
3. MPs passed with 45 yes votes to 36 no votes the request to assess the constitutional consequences caused by the delay in the implementation of the FC and those that would be caused if the FC was rejected at a referendum.
4. Specifically, Steenbergen et al. (2003, 27) explain: "For each speech, including interruptions, we distinguish between relevant and irrelevant parts, and only the relevant parts are coded. A relevant part is one that contains a demand, that is, a proposal on what decision should or should not be made. Irrelevant parts make no demands; / ... / Our emphasis on demands stems from the fact that they constitute the heart of the deliberation. That is, demands stipulate what ought to be and what ought not to be, and this normative character puts them at the centre of discourse ethics."
5. However, it seems that there is no common understanding about selection of the number of demands to code in a statement because various studies apply different techniques (for example, Bächtiger and Steenbergen 2004; Spörndli 2003; Steiner et al. 2004). In this context, Bächtiger (as quoted in Roald and Sangolt 2012, 67) argues that a better validity of the coding could be obtained when it is decided beforehand which demands

should be coded and when the analysis is reduced to a very few number of demands. His observation was confirmed in our small-size pilot coding of statements, when we could reliably identify only the first demand in a statement; in part because generally many of the subsequent demands were derived from the first demand (e.g. focusing only one [more specific] aspect of the first demand) or because they addressed diverse procedural issues (which did not fit the definition of a content-related demand).

6. We observed the procedure developed by Gwet (2014) to interpret the correspondence of coders' agreement on the basis of  $AC_1$  statistics, which is based on the Landis–Koch comparative scale. We determined that sufficiently reliably measured variables were those with a value of  $AC_1$  statistics higher than 0.6 (see Gwet 2014).
7. See Kuhar and Petrovčič (2015) for more details.
8. Refer to Petrič and Atanasova (2015) for more details.
9. See Kuhar and Petrovčič (2015) for more details on the categorisation of the actors.
10. For a bivariate analysis of the relationship between individual factors and specific variables in the DQI, refer to Kuhar and Petrovčič (2015).

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**Metka Kuhar** (corresponding author) is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia. E-mail: metka.kuhar@fdv.uni-lj.si

**Andraž Petrovčič** is Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia. E-mail: andraz.petrovcic@fdv.uni-lj.si