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## Social Sciences in Armenia: Rethinking Politics and International Relations After 1991

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**Abstract.** The development of social sciences in the post-Soviet space is perceived as a rather unexplored layer of knowledge, representing a whole range of problems that arise in societies in transition (starting from the educational system to the publication of specific academic works). From this perspective, the article is analyzing the case of development of social sciences in Armenia starting from 1991, when it received independence after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The article argues, that in the case of Armenia (as well as some post-communist societies), we can see a change in discourse with shifting the emphasis from the historiographical paradigm to the sociocultural or humanitarian one. The following situation arises: the existing theories of political science and international relations overlap with the realities of transitional societies crises of political development in the country. As a result they may not always give the necessary results, since the scientific community has not yet developed a specific approach in the context of the development of academic schools of thought and localized general theoretical approaches. Based on the above the article tests the main hypothesis, which is that the development of social sciences in Armenia is characterized by fragmentation or excessive obsession with specific issues of international relations. In terms of the development of political science in Armenia the article checks three domains: development of political science as a scientific discipline after the disintegration of the Soviet Union; teaching of political science and international relations; as well as the level of think tanks and expert community. The article concludes that despite a 30-year development process, political science in Armenia remains fragmented and needs, one the hand, more cooperation inside the field, and, on the other hand, more state support for better concentration and efficiency.

**Keywords:** political science, international relations, social science, Armenia

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## Социальные науки в Армении: переосмысление политики и международных отношений после 1991 года

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**Аннотация.** Развитие социальных наук на постсоветском пространстве воспринимается как малоисследованная сфера, включающая множество проблем, характерных для стран с переходной экономикой. Это касается таких областей, как система образования и система публикации научных трудов. Исследование посвящено изучению развития социальных наук в Армении с момента обретения ею независимости в 1991 г. после распада СССР. Авторы утверждают, что в армянском обществе, как и в других посткоммунистических странах, наблюдается сдвиг от историографического к социокультурному или гуманитарному дискурсу. Теории политологии и международных отношений адаптируются к реалиям переходных обществ и политическим кризисам, но часто оказываются недостаточно эффективными из-за отсутствия локализованных теоретических подходов и сформированных академических школ. Основная гипотеза исследования состоит в том, что развитие общественных наук в Армении носит фрагментарный характер, сосредоточено на узких аспектах международных отношений. В отношении политологии рассматриваются следующие направления: развитие дисциплины после распада СССР, преподавание политологии и международных отношений, а также деятельность аналитических центров и экспертных сообществ. Вывод авторов заключается в том, что, несмотря на тридцатилетнее развитие, политология в Армении остается фрагментированной и требует как большего сотрудничества внутри отрасли, так и государственной поддержки для улучшения концентрации и эффективности.

**Ключевые слова:** политология, международные отношения, общественные науки, Армения

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### Introduction

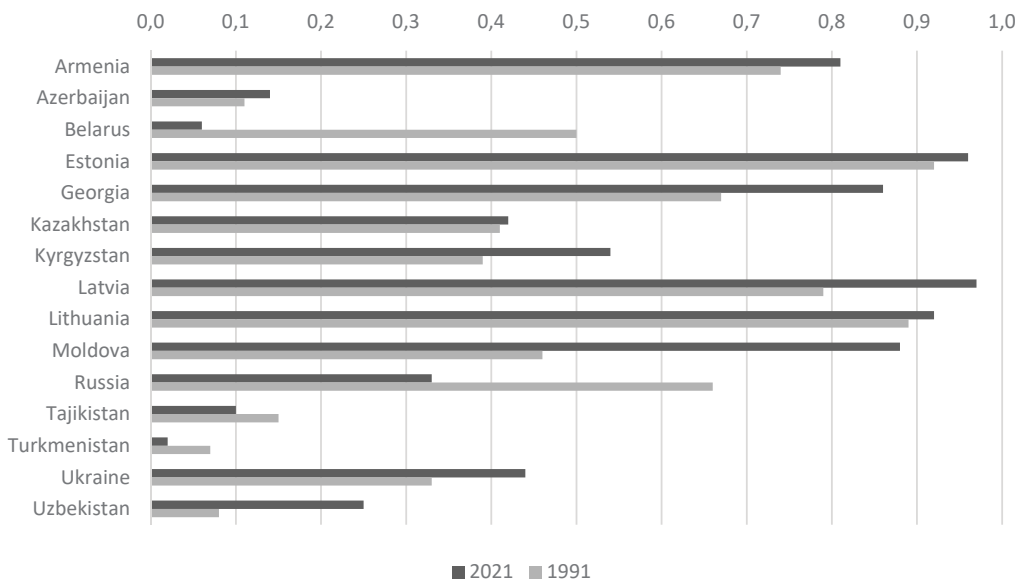
The formation of politics and international relations in the post-Soviet space relates to several specific circumstances and complexities caused by the transitional nature of the development of society, socio-economic problems and the legacy of the Soviet era. The specificity of politics and international relations also concerns regime transformations that occur both within states and societies and outside them. Based on this, the analysis of the development of social sciences in the post-Soviet republics can provide an opportunity to take a new look at the problem of the connection between education, science and social-political processes.

The development of political science in the countries of the post-Soviet space was characterized by a few common features, some of which have survived to this day. In addition, political and social-economic problems impeded the development of these scientific directions due to the lack of resources and the dispersion of funds. At the same time, the influence of the Soviet perception of social sciences on the establishment of new scientific disciplines was felt. On the other hand, in the context of teaching political science and international relations, it was necessary to clarify and specify the conceptual-categorical apparatus, as well as determine the priorities of research, which were influenced by the following circumstances.

1. Despite the generally accepted opinion that political science as a separate scientific discipline was absent in the USSR, many scientists (primarily Russian) are trying to analyze the development of the germs of political science in the Soviet Union and prove the continuity of scientific schools reflected in the activities of certain institutions (MGIMO, the Leningrad school, IMEMO, INION RAS, etc.) [Vorobiev 2004]. Their opponents point out the impossibility of applying some basic concepts of “Western” political science to Soviet realities (the classical understanding of “state”, “politics”, etc.) [Fursov 2014], which makes it natural that such scientific areas as political science and international relations are absent in the Soviet era. At the same time, in the Soviet Union, there were still some institutions aimed at analyzing political processes. In 1960, the Soviet Association of Political (State Studies) Sciences (SAP (G)N) was established, which became the basis for the creation of the Russian structure of the same name in the future (2015). It is noteworthy that in Moscow and the regional branches of this organization the main composition was represented by historians, lawyers, and economists, which in turn influenced the perception of political processes through the prism of other, “non-political” disciplines. After the collapse of the USSR, representatives of these specializations began to have a greater influence on the content and formal side of the development of political science and international relations.
2. The traditions of studying and teaching social sciences in the USSR have left a deep mark on the development of these disciplines in the post-Soviet period. For example, historians in the USSR had the practice of preparing a single specialist in a chosen subject. It was believed that one specialist for each period would suffice, since this is an irrational waste of resources. Deliberate fragmentation of the topic into smaller ones led to the fact that discussions did not arise when discussing specific topics. This is how “scientific feudalism” arose, where graduate students were given small scientific fiefs (small cases) for supporting their overlord [Sokolov, Titaev 2013]. In the post-Soviet space (including Armenia), this tradition has been preserved to this day.
3. Another circumstance is the ideologization of the social sciences in the paradigm of “scientific communism” or “dialectical materialism”. It is not for nothing that the first departments of political science were created on the basis of the departments of “scientific communism”. However, along with institutional and personnel continuity, the influence of some narratives on the formation of new scientific disciplines was visible [Chulitskaya, Matonyte, Gudelis, Sprincean 2022]. Thus,

some historical or economic concepts, even when revised in the new conditions, became a serious obstacle to the development of political science, tying the analysis of many processes in domestic and foreign policy to widespread myths, misconceptions, or preferences of newly minted researchers.

The necessity to create new scientific disciplines in the field of politics and international relations confronted the general trends of the disintegrating and once unified educational and expert sphere with local specifics. However, this process was more about form than content, since the academic community of the independent republics, moving to new standards, was engaged in imitation or, at best, “stretching” Western concepts to local conditions [Sartori 1970]. No doubt, in many post-Soviet countries it was already possible to do without the ritual citation of K. Marx, F. Engels or V. Lenin to justify the relevance of the study. However, in the new conditions, it was necessary to refer to new political “authorities” (this trend is especially visible in Azerbaijan and some republics of Central Asia). Based on the same index of academic freedom in post-Soviet countries (Figure 1), which reflects freedom to research and teach, the freedom of academic exchange and dissemination, institutional autonomy of higher education institutions, campus integrity (meaning the absence of surveillance and security infringements), and the freedom of academic and cultural expression [Spannagel, Kinzelbach 2022], one can judge the connection between the political situation in the country and its influence on the development of social sciences. However, the most important aspect remains the content of disciplines that either repeat foreign approaches to understanding domestic politics and international relations or offer a new perspective. Despite the rather high level of academic freedom in Armenia, this phenomenon remains more of a cultural phenomenon than a basis for scientific development.



**Figure 1.** Academic freedom index in Post-Soviet Space (1991, 2021)

Source: highcharts.com, V-Dem data version 12

### **Politics and International Relations in Armenia**

Armenian Professor A. Margarov, summing up the results of the thirteen-year development of political science in Armenia, drew attention to several factors that hindered the development of political science:

1. Lack of traditions, scientific schools, and at the initial stage — specialists and professional literature. There were practically no efforts on the part of the state aimed at the development of an academic discipline or branch of knowledge. The introduction of a political science course as a compulsory academic discipline in universities was caused both by the need to abandon the teaching of scientific communism and the history of the party, and by the need to master new democratic values.
2. There was a centralization (monopolization) of the main political science centers and resources in the capital. In a small-scale republic, after a break in the early 1990s, ties between universities and researchers have been preserved, professional contacts with colleagues from abroad have resumed, although less intensively than it was desired to.
3. The problem of integrating the political science community of Armenia into regional and larger professional networks persisted in the context of the collapse of the Soviet humanitarian space. In addition to subjective factors, the process of professional integration was negatively affected by several objective conditions: the information blockade of the early 90s, the age of teachers (for example, the average age of employees of the Department of Political Science of Yerevan State University in the early 90s was 50–55 years), lack of knowledge of foreign languages and so on. Political science in Armenia turned out to be isolated from world development trends, which is also manifested in the lack of organization of the scientific community.
4. The underdeveloped infrastructure, the disunity of researchers, their certain isolation in specific areas or subdisciplines, the absence, with rare exceptions, of an integrated approach to the study of problems negatively influenced the process of formation of political science.
5. Previous attempts to build professional organizations have been unsuccessful. According to a few experts, some researchers and / or research centers headed by them, due to their bias or involvement in practical politics, ended up away from science, stopping their work as political scientists and starting, rather, the activities of a politician. A number of existing or registered research centers, deprived of material and human resources for professional activities, ended their short-term existence [Margarov 2004].

Nowadays, most of the above listed factors that hindered the development of political science in the early period of Armenia's development, are still there. Even though many representatives of the academic community of Armenia were able to join the international networks of political science and established contacts with foreign colleagues, this did not contribute to the formation of scientific schools

due to the lack of platforms for interaction between decision makers and political scientists. Fragmentary state support for political science eventually led to the formation of closed professional groups that periodically work with the authorities and foreign funds, which could affect the degree of objectivity of the examination. The institutionalization of political science within institutions of higher education remained largely limited in the context of a lack of resources, the use of outdated teaching and research methods, as well as the repetition of research topics due to the lack of external funding.

### **Academic platforms — Universities**

Academic political science in Armenia originated on the basis of the former departments of scientific communism, nomenclature networks, communities of historians and Armenologists. This circumstance left its mark on the development of political science departments in Armenia, which, along with the educational process, created certain narratives that limited the study of political processes and international relations within the framework of a narrow specialization, splitting the subject of political science and international relations into smaller segments, “privatized” by individual scientists (the Karabakh issue, information security, political parties, problems of terrorism, political Turkology, Iranian studies, etc.). This, in turn, affected the quality of students’ work, who had to write term papers or master’s theses on the same topics every year.

This approach can be explained by the influence of Soviet historiographic methodology, and later by the lack of motivation of scientists to expand their subject or attempt to use an interdisciplinary approach. The humanities that do not lend themselves very well to propaganda — such as archeology, ethnography, geography, linguistics and culture studies — were free from ideological pressure. Such as disciplines of Ancient and Medieval history in Armenia which was also significantly less politicized than modern history. This created favorable conditions for rather intensive research on Armenian history, with a focus on ancient and medieval times. Traditionally strong in Armenia since pre-Soviet times, history began to play a special role in Soviet Armenia; in fact, Armenian history as a discipline had the tendency to usurp the resources of other humanities. Even now, historians continue to dominate in the humanities and social sciences of post-Soviet Armenia, with historical methods being applied to other, newly emerging fields of study, such as political science and sociology, in fact calling for entirely different approaches (2011).

In any case, one can conclude that the structure of Soviet science even today continues to influence the development of research in modern Armenia. Before the collapse of the USSR, only state research organizations could exist in Armenia. These included universities and educational institutes (focused on education and with few resources for research), as well as research institutes associated with the Academy of Sciences, in which most of the research was carried out: the Institute of Ancient Manuscripts “Matenadaran”, the Institutes of History,



Oriental Studies, ethnography and archeology, etc. Many of these institutions had a strong reputation in the USSR, and some were of international importance (for example, the Matenadaran). In universities and educational institutions, each faculty had bodies that regulated research activities, called Chairs. Thus, the Faculty of History of Yerevan State University had chairs of the history of Armenia, world history, etc. Yerevan State University was the largest university in Soviet Armenia in general and in the field of the humanities in particular. The Faculty of Oriental Studies at Yerevan State University, subdivided into Turkology, Arabic Studies and Iranian Studies, had a strong reputation in the former USSR. Many educated within the framework of academic institutions and humanitarian faculties of YSU in the post-Soviet period became the basis for the formation of the political science community in Armenia in the future. At YSU, the basis for the formation of the Faculty of International Relations (which includes also Politics) was the Department of International Relations, formed in 1990 on the basis of the Faculty of Oriental Studies, and from the 1991–1992 academic year — the Faculty of History.

Nowadays, political science and international relations are represented in many universities in Armenia. However, there are almost no departments of political science and international relations with an extensive system and well-developed curricula related to purely political science. Out of the eight universities in Armenia and Artsakh, which cover some areas of political science and international relations, only two universities present these specialties in their full form at the undergraduate and graduate levels — these are the Yerevan State University and the Russian-Armenian University (RAU). Political science at YSU is represented within the framework of the Faculty of International Relations and includes four departments: the Department of Political Science, the Department of International Relations and Diplomacy, the Department of Public Administration, and the Department of Foreign Service and Professional Communication. The RAU has a Department of Political Science and a Department of World Politics and International Relations. Since 2021, a four-year program ‘Bachelor of Arts in Politics and Governance’ (BAPG) has been established at the American University of Armenia to support the Master of Political Science and International Affairs (MPSIA) program, designed to train personnel in the field of politics and public administration.<sup>1</sup> Such universities and educational institutions as the Armenian State Pedagogical University, the Academy of Public Administration of the Republic of Armenia, the State University after V. Bryusova, Artsakh State University, International Scientific and Educational Center of NAS RA have only MA programs or take into account the specificities of the educational center while providing teaching political science. This situation can be explained both by the lack of state social order and the unpopularity of the direction of political science as a scientific

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<sup>1</sup> College of Humanities & Social Sciences Launches Two New Programs. Retrieved August 22, 2024, from <https://newsroom.aua.am/2020/09/23/college-humanities-social-sciences-new-programs/>

discipline (the direction of “international relations” is more prestigious)<sup>2</sup>, and by the limited labor market.

The reasons why political science as a discipline and branch of knowledge is not given due attention can be divided into two groups of external and intradisciplinary factors. External factors relate to the formation of the political system of Armenia, the stability of the political process and the effectiveness of state institutions and, as a result, the formation of the interest of state and political institutions in supporting the political science community. Intradisciplinary factors, in turn, relate to the lack of guidelines reflected in the study of certain topics, exaggerated interest in unimportant issues, lack of communication within the scientific community. At the crossroads of these factors, the main difficulties in the development of political science are already being formed, expressed in the lack of funding, the unattractiveness of these disciplines for young scientists. In addition, there is some usurpation of the methodology of political science and theories of international relations by areas of Oriental and Armenian studies, which are interpreted in the current conditions more widely and exist in many cases on the border of science and propaganda, that is, the study of a complex of disciplines dedicated to Armenian history, culture and language, as well as the study of neighboring societies, is perceived by many as part of practical politics.

### Science

The shortcomings in the development of post-Soviet political science were supposed to smooth out the training and graduation of a new generation of political scientists and international affairs specialists, brought up in conditions of independent statehood. This process dragged on for thirty years and continues to this day. Since 1993, in the Republic of Armenia 126 PhD dissertations in different aspects of political science were successfully defended (including, 19 in theory of politics, 74 in political institutions and processes, and 33 in international relations).<sup>3</sup> From 1996 to 2021, Armenian scientists published 76 articles on political science and international relations in the journals included in the Scopus database.<sup>4</sup> Based on Web of Science data from 2010 to 2020, in the field of political science, 39 articles in political science were published (Figure 2). This information demonstrates the fact that political science and international relations today occupies an important place among the social sciences in the republic, however, the relatively low level of scientific publications and the bias towards journalistic activity make political disciplines marginal in many respects.

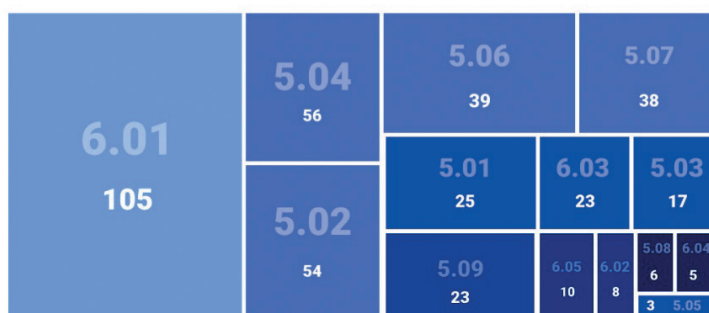
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<sup>2</sup> This academic year, 9729 applicants entered the university. The results of the entrance exams have been summarized. Retrieved August, 22, 2024, from <https://escs.am/am/news/13424>

<sup>3</sup> The information was provided by RA Supreme Certifying Committee, Retrieved August, 22, 2024 from [www.boh.am](http://www.boh.am)

<sup>4</sup> Scimago Journal and Country Rank. Retrieved August, 22, 2024, from <https://www.scimagojr.com/countryrank.php?category=3320&region=Eastern%20Europe>





The number of scientific articles published by scientific research organizations and universities of Armenia in the years 2010-2020 in humanities and social sciences, according to the data of the InCites database of the Web of Science (as of July 29, 2021)

- 6.01 History, archaeology
- 5.04 Sociology
- 5.02 Economics and Business
- 5.06 Political Sciences
- 5.07 Social and Economic geography
- 5.01 Psychology
- 5.09 Other social sciences
- 6.03 Philosophy, Ethics, Religious studies
- 5.03 Pedagogical sciences
- 6.05 Other humanities
- 6.02 Linguistics, Literary studies
- 5.08 Mass Media and Communications
- 6.04 Arts
- 5.05 Law

**Figure 2.** Graphics of the number of scientific publications, provided by the Science Committee of the Republic of Armenia  
 Source: Armenia’s Relationship With the Humanities and Social Sciences. Retrieved August, 22, 2024, from <https://envreport.com/raw-unfiltered/armenias-relationship-with-the-humanities-and-social-sciences/>

### Think tanks and informal political science

Starting from the first years of independence, the subject of research for Armenian political scientists was rather narrow and concerned, first, security issues and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution. Gradually, the topics studied began to concern the problems of political development, modernization, institutions, etc. Some disciplines, including those demand from external donors and the local market, did not exist just 30 years ago and had to be developed from scratch. This led to the creation of many analytical centers and think tanks aimed at developing “new” themes of democratization, human rights, ethnic conflicts, gender studies, etc. On the other hand, university departments and similar centers were filled with former professors of Marxist disciplines, who in fact were not scientists, but propaganda workers by origin, which, in turn, influenced the ideologization of the activities of the newly created structures. Many think-tanks were closed due to lack of funding, and their staff flowed to new institutions that tried to find new sources of funding, which affected the level of objectivity of the expertise

[Atoyan 2021]. Of all the think tanks dealing with issues of domestic politics and international relations, one can specify “Caucasus Institute”<sup>5</sup>, Caucasus Research Resource Center-Armenia (CRRC-Armenia)<sup>6</sup>, “Enlight” Public Research Center<sup>7</sup>, which manage to keep their niche in the expert field and have the potential for development. Again, it is difficult to single out purely political think tanks, since public opinion about politics and political processes is also influenced by other organizations and foundations that are not directly involved in research but attract political scientists to create reports and briefs (for example, Open Society Foundations — Armenia).

In the 2000s the state attempted to create think tanks engaged in political research, although in many respects these attempts were associated with the initiative of individuals. In 2004, the Institute of Policy Research was created affiliated with the Presidential Staff, which became the basis for the work of think tanks under the executive branch. The Drastamat Kanayan Institute of National Strategic Studies affiliated with the Ministry of Defense was also opened, based on which later the National Defense Research University was subsequently created, where until 2018 the dissertation council in political sciences was functioning. For several reasons, the government’s efforts to create information and analytical centers have not led to the formation of permanent platforms for political expertise that contribute to decision-making. Today, there is an attempt to establish such a platform based on ORBELI — Analytical Research Center.

Some political parties have also tried to create factories of political thought, focusing on Western experience in this context. The Republican Party of Armenia has the most successful experience in this sense, expressed in the creation of the information and analytical center Luys Foundation<sup>8</sup>, as well as the organization Andranik Margaryan Political School. In addition, one can recall several other parties, in relation to which political schools or think tanks operated, but such phenomena were short-lived and not frequent.

After 2020 (Second Artsakh war) given the background of the ongoing internal and external political crises in Armenia, political science also experienced a transitional state, fraught with the spread of a political split between the authorities and the opposition among the scientific community. In the past, in Armenia attempts were made to create scientific networks in the field of political knowledge, which did not end in success, as the initiators tried to centralize political science around any figure or institution, rather than organize a system of constant contacts between all Armenian political scientists. In any case, political instability also affected the understanding of political processes by the scientific community, a large number of new platforms have opened, seeking to rethink and direct

<sup>5</sup> Cucasus Institute. Retrieved August, 22, 2024 from <http://c-i.am/en/front/>

<sup>6</sup> Caucasus Research Resource Center Armenia. Retrieved August, 22, 2024, from <https://www.crrc.am/>

<sup>7</sup> “Enlight” Public Research Center NGO. Retrieved August, 22, 2024, from <https://enlightngo.org/language/en/main-en>

<sup>8</sup> Luys Center. Retrieved August, 22, 2024, from <https://luys.am/>

Armenian political research and thought in general. Such examples include The Applied Policy Research Institute of Armenia (APRI Armenia) by AGBU<sup>9</sup>, Koghb Foundation<sup>10</sup>, Armenian Project<sup>11</sup>, etc.

### Conclusions

The research demonstrates that politics and international relations as academic disciplines are still in the process of formation after 30 years of ‘independence’ from Soviet school of social sciences. There are several problems in this process, which might be summarized in 1) lack of state support because of misunderstanding of the role that political science can play in nation and state building, foreign policy, and security, 2) derivation from the first problem — the issue of “Ivory Tower”, when decision-making and science exist in parallel. This leads to decreasing interest towards political science and international relations both on academic and educational levels, 3) continuing Soviet tradition with dominance of research methods coming from historiography.

In 2021, the RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports stated that out of 224 scientific topics that received funding, only 27 were in social sciences.<sup>12</sup> Despite the turbulent political processes in Armenia, the development of social sciences and the humanities is still not a priority, although they continue to be under the close attention of foreign funds and organizations. In Armenia, unfortunately, to this day, the political science community has not been able to develop general principles of activity regarding both the objectivity of research and the connection with practical politics. Academia is not able to cope with this problem alone, since this requires state support, reform of the education system and a change in the financing system. In other words, it is necessary to combat the politicization of the social science, cultivate a culture of discussion and dispute-making, and set up a system of training and motivation (including financial) in political science and international relations for healthy competition, which contributes to the self-development of a scientist and academic environment in the country.

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<sup>9</sup> The Applied Policy Research Institute of Armenia. Retrieved August, 22, 2024, from <https://www.apri.institute/>

<sup>10</sup> The “Koghb” Digital Studio Retrieved August, 22, 2024, from <https://koghb.org/en/>

<sup>11</sup> The Armenian Project. Retrieved August, 22, 2024, from <https://armenianproject.com/>

<sup>12</sup> The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia. Retrieved August, 22, 2024, from <https://escs.am/am/news/10184>

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