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## **EMERGING INDUSTRY OF THINK TANKS IN ARMENIA**

*The paper presents the results of the research of the think tank sector in Armenia. The process of emerging and the process of development of the think tank sector since Armenia's independence, as well as the main factors hindering the development of that sphere and its full establishment were studied. The current situation and peculiarities of the think tank industry in Armenia were analyzed, including the quantitative and typological landscape of think tanks. The author has also touched upon the role and the influence of think tanks in the public policy of Armenia, as well as upon the cooperation issues with decision-makers. The summary outlines certain approaches, the application of which can have a positive impact and stimulate the development of the think tank industry in Armenia.*

**Keywords:** *Armenia, think tanks, ideas industry, marketplace of ideas, public policy, research institutions*

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**Introduction.** In recent decades unprecedented transformations in the information and technology spheres, global political processes and constantly changing mosaic of international security had a significant impact on public policy. The risks associated with these realities, as well as the difficulty of adapting to such rapid change, and predicting upcoming scenarios, tremendously increase the uncertainty about the future for societies and political elites, and complicate decision-making for decision-makers. The composition and

the level of involvement of the actors, who make the political decisions, are involved in the process of their implementation, ensure the public legitimacy of those decisions, are gradually changing. As a result, in the sphere of public policy, the need for the involvement of new actors in the process of decision-making and preparation of political decisions and their implementation, and in the development of a new paradigm for the expert leadership, is gradually escalating.

In the above-mentioned context, it is no coincidence that in recent decades the think tanks have become active actors in the process of public policy in many countries, including the preparation of decisions, their examination, evaluation of effectiveness, and public legitimacy. In this respect, the last decades have always been accompanied by an increase in the number of think tanks and by regular growth of the latter's role in public policy.

It is noteworthy, however, that the political and social system of each country has its peculiarities. Therefore, in the think tank sector, it is not always possible to replicate or apply a successful development experience of one country in another country<sup>1</sup>. However, in the case of availability of favorable political culture, or providing other necessary certain conditions, the think tanks can both develop rapidly, and acquire the role of a sphere that serves the national interest, and can be actively involved in shaping foreign and domestic policy. In result, think tanks can form a unique pole of influence on public policy.

It is no coincidence that the think tanks are becoming quite remarkable and significant in countries where there has been no tradition of such independent policy consultation in the past<sup>2</sup>. In this context, the process of establishing the think tank sector in countries in transition, including Armenia, is of academic interest. As Raymond Struyk and Samuel Haddaway truly state, "The literature for transition and developing nations is more limited but more relevant because Western policy research organizations are generally larger, better resourced, and operate in policy environments that are more open to input from policy research organizations"<sup>3</sup>.

In this regard, the process of emerging the think tank industry in Armenia in its modern sense has begun in the 1990s, when, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the restoration of independence, alongside the public administration system, democratic and civil society institutions, researches in public policy gradually began to emerge that are relatively more independent actors.

Over the past three decades, the think tank sector in Armenia has come a long way, but there are still many factors that hinder and disallow the full

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<sup>1</sup> **Weaver, R.K.** (1989). The Changing World of Think Tanks. *PS: Political Science & Politics*. September, 22 (3): 563-578.

<sup>2</sup> **Åberg, P., Einarsson, S., and Reuter, M.** (2021). Think Tanks: New Organizational Actors in a Changing Swedish Civil Society. *Voluntas*, 32: 634–648. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-019-00174-9>

<sup>3</sup> **Struyk, R.J., and Haddaway, S.R.** (2011). What Makes a Successful Policy Research Organization in Transition and Developing Countries?. *Nonprofit Policy Forum*, 2: 1. <https://doi.org/10.2202/2154-3348.1021>

development of the sphere. This research aims to identify and analyze those factors.

**Literature review.** Considering the fact of gradual increase of the role and influence of the think tanks in public policy around the world, the discussion topic has had its major place among the researches of academic society for several decades.

Academic discussions and publications on think tanks have been gaining momentum since the late 1980s. In recent years, many fundamental works have been published on the think tank sector and its various issues which have been of great importance in terms of further development and conceptualization of academic discourse in this sphere. Among them are for example valuable publications of Andrew Denham<sup>4</sup>, Andrew Rich<sup>5</sup>, Andrew Selee<sup>6</sup>, Alexander Sungurov<sup>7</sup>, Diane Stone<sup>8</sup>, Donald E. Abelson<sup>9</sup>, Enrique Mendizabal<sup>10</sup>, Hartwig Pautz<sup>11</sup>, James A. Smith<sup>12</sup>, James G. McGann<sup>13</sup>, Jordan Tchilingirian<sup>14</sup>, Mahmood Ahmad<sup>15</sup>, Md. Rahat Hasan<sup>16</sup>, Raymond Struyk<sup>17</sup>, R. Kent Weaver<sup>18</sup>, Stephen

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<sup>4</sup> **Denham, A.R.J.** (1996). *Think-tanks of the New Right*. Aldershot: Dartmouth Press.

<sup>5</sup> **Rich, A.** (2004). *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>6</sup> **Selee, A.D.** (2013). *What should Think Tanks Do? A Strategic Guide to Policy Impact*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804789295>

<sup>7</sup> **Sungurov, A.** (2020). *Expert Communities and Government*. Moscow: ROSSPEN. (In Russian).

<sup>8</sup> **Stone, D.** (1996). *Capturing the Political Imagination: Think Tanks and the Policy Process*. London: Frank Class.

<sup>9</sup> **Abelson, D.E.** (1996). *American Think Tanks and their Role in the U.S. Foreign Policy*. New York: St. Martins Press; Abelson, D.E. (2006). *A Capitol Idea: Think Tanks and US Foreign Policy*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

<sup>10</sup> **Mendizabal, E.** (2021). Describing and comparing think tanks. In *Handbook on Think Tanks in Public Policy*, edited by D.E. Abelson and CH.J. Rastrick, 16-32. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781789901849.00011>

<sup>11</sup> **Pautz, H.** (2011). Revisiting the think-tank phenomenon. *Public policy and administration*, 26(4), 419-435. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0952076710378328>

<sup>12</sup> **Smith, J.A.** (1991). *Idea brokers: Think tanks and the rise of the new policy elite*. New York: Free Press.

<sup>13</sup> **McGann, J.G.** (2007). *Think Tanks and Policy Advice in the US: Academics, Advisors and Advocates*. New York: Routledge; McGann, J.G. (2016). *The Fifth Estate: Think Tanks, Public Policy and Governance*. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

<sup>14</sup> **Tchilingirian, J.** (2021). Network Intellectuals and Networked Intellectuals: relational approaches to the study of British think tanks. In *Handbook on Think Tanks in Public Policy*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

<sup>15</sup> **Ahmad, M.** (2008). US Think Tanks and the Politics of Expertise: Role, Value and Impact. *The Political Quarterly*, 79: 529-555. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-923X.2008.00964.x>

<sup>16</sup> **Hasan, M.R.** (2012). *Foreign Policy and Strategic Issues: Think Tanks in US and South Asia*. New Delhi: New Century Publications.

<sup>17</sup> **Struyk, R.J.** (2006). *Managing Think Tanks: Practical Guidance for Maturing Organizations*. Expanded 2nd ed., Budapest: OSI/LGI and Urban Institute.

<sup>18</sup> **Weaver, R.K.** (1989). The Changing World of Think Tanks. *PS: Political Science & Politics*. September, 22 (3): 563-578.

Boucher<sup>19</sup>, Thomas Medvetz<sup>20</sup>, works co-authored by Andrew Denham and Mark Garnett<sup>21</sup>, and James G. McGann and R. Kent Weaver<sup>22</sup>.

The basis of the published studies was the definition of a “think tank”, the typology of these institutions, the formation of think tanks in the political culture of different countries, the peculiarities of development, as well as the evolution of the sector, ideological orientations and the growing importance of think tanks in public policy. The issues concerning the funding of think tanks, the functioning of public policy, the role in foreign and domestic policy, public discourse, relations with the government, mechanisms for influencing the society and decision-makers and the peculiarities of think tanks management, and a lot of other various issues have been comprehensively studied.

Thorough works on this sphere contain also publications devoted to the contemporary issues of the industry and the expertise of ideas, including the notable books by Tom Nichols<sup>23</sup> and Daniel W. Drezner<sup>24</sup>.

In general, the academic discourse on think tanks can be divided into two main groups. The first group may include the topics related to the organizational and management peculiarities of the think tanks, the preconditions of the origins and the development of these institutions in different countries, the issues of the current situation and sector, the issues of funding and public policy impact.

Accordingly, the second group may include the observations of researchers, which aim to identify the role and importance of expertise in public policy, political system, public discourse, decision-making, involving trends in these areas.

Nevertheless, the think tanks industry in Armenia is still poorly studied, and there is barely any work on the think tank sector in Armenia or its issues, especially in the English-language academic publications, with a few exceptions<sup>25</sup>. Obviously, the very limited number of publications available cannot fill the gap. The urgency and the relevance of this publication are conditioned by the above-mentioned factors. This is an attempt to partially fill the gap of academic

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<sup>19</sup> Boucher, S., et al. (2004). *Europe and its think tanks; a promise to be fulfilled. An analysis of think tanks specialised in European policy issues in the enlarged European Union*. Studies and Research: 35, October, Paris, Notre Europe.

<sup>20</sup> Medvetz, T. (2012). *Think Tanks in America*. Chicago: University Chicago Press.

<sup>21</sup> Denham, A., and Garnett, M. (1998). *British think-tanks and the climate of opinion*. London: UCL Press.

<sup>22</sup> McGann, J.G., and Weaver, R.K. (2002). *Think Tanks and civil societies: catalyst for ideas and action*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

<sup>23</sup> Nichols, T. (2017). *The Death of Expertise: The Campaign against Established Knowledge and Why It Matters*. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>24</sup> Drezner, D.W. (2017). *The Ideas Industry: How Pessimists, Partisans, and Plutocrats are Transforming the Marketplace of Ideas*. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>25</sup> See, Atoyán, V. (2017). Some features of Armenian Think Tank Industry. *European Science Review*, 3-4: 87-89; Atoyán, V. (2017). Armenian Think Tanks influence aspects on Public Policy. *European Journal of Law and Political Sciences*, 2: 59-62; Atoyán, V. (2015). University affiliated think tanks in Armenia. *Austrian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 11-12: 58-59; Iskandaryan, A., and Dafflon, D. eds. (2011). *An Assessment of Research Capacities in Social Sciences and Humanities in Armenia*. Caucasus Institute Research Papers: 4, Yerevan: Caucasus Institute.

literature on Armenian think tanks in the English language, to outline the current situation and dynamics of the development of the think tanks in Armenia.

**Methods.** Within the framework of the preparation of the presented publication, information was collected, coordinated, developed, and analyzed about the institutions that are more active in the sphere of public policy of Armenia, thus can be functionally defined as the think tanks. The following criteria developed by Allern and Pollack were used as a basis to distinguish think tanks from other institutions, and to identify think tanks in terms of the function: “The organisation must be a non-profit institution and engaged in independent research and/or dissemination of research-based knowledge in one or more policy areas. The organization may be funded privately or by the government, but must be organized independently and represent its own voice in policy debates. The organization must regularly produce and disseminate research articles and/or reports that are made available for a wider public. The organization must be engaged in opinion building and networking via seminars, conferences or other public events. The organisation must have known leadership”<sup>26</sup>.

To collect the data and to check the compliance with the above-mentioned criteria and within the framework of the empirical approach, the official websites of several dozen Armenian organizations, close to performing similar functions as the think tanks, were examined. The necessary information was collected and processed, due to which it was possible to get a more complete picture of the real level of involvement of the think tanks in the public policy of Armenia.

To determine the typology of the selected organizations, to receive additional and more up-to-date data on them, in March-April of 2021 e-mails were sent and information was received from relevant organizations.

During the research historical, cultural, institutional, systematic, generalizing, and empirical methods, principles and approaches of research were mainly used. In particular, the historical method has made it possible to analyze changes in political norms and environmental factors in the context of the past and the present. This approach also allowed to analyze the evolutionary changes and characteristics of the think tanks in Armenia. The cultural method provided an opportunity to consider the involvement of think tanks in the public policy of Armenia in the context of the peculiarities of local political culture. The institutional method made it possible to identify and describe the institutional issues that contribute to or hinder the development of the think tank sector.

The systematic method enabled us to consider the think tank sector in Armenia within a complex wholeness of public policy, as well as to analyze the involvement of think tanks in the policy-making process. The generalizing method was used as well, which provided an opportunity to summarize the observations and approaches proposed by other researchers dealing with the sphere.

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<sup>26</sup> Allern, S., and Pollack, E. (2020). The role of think tanks in the Swedish political landscape. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 43 (3): 145–169. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12180>

**Results and discussion.** The last decade of the previous century marked the beginning of global geopolitical transformations. The collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War created a completely new situation in the region and in the world. Along with the other Republics that were part of the Soviet Union, Armenia gained independence too. It was then that the first independent think tanks resembling Western models gradually emerged, along with the establishment of government institutions, democratic values, and civil society institutions in a newly independent state. It should be noted that, despite some difficulties of the transition period, there is already a small community of think tanks in Armenia that plays a certain role in public policy.

It should also be mentioned that during the Soviet years, there were structures in Soviet Armenia that somewhat duplicated some of the functions of modern think tanks, but taking into account the conceptual difference in their operating format, and the fact that of not being an independent actor, it is not proper to classify the latter among the think tanks in their modern sense. As Katarzyna Jezierska states clearly, “given the conditions of policymaking under communist rule, these institutions were heavily controlled by the party and did not even aspire to make an appearance of independence”<sup>27</sup>.

Obviously, in the Soviet period, the highly centered state administrative system, the ideological pressure of intolerance towards variety of opinions, severely limited both the political and economic alternatives of the state development and the development and implementation of non-standard or alternative approaches for the political and economic reforms, which is one of the important functional features of modern think tanks. As Chankseliani, Lovakov, and Pislyakov describe, “The Soviet research community was uniform and centralized, highly politicized, and entirely state-driven.”<sup>28</sup> It is natural that in such conditions there could not be institutions that do not correspond to the state official ideology, with an alternative perspective, which is a significant component of civil society.

Thus, in the 21st century, the academic system, the industry of ideas and the intellectual potential need to be classified as one of the soft infrastructure vital to the country. At the same time, the country's academic system, as a workshop for “producing” scholars, experts, analysts, professionals in various spheres, is the intellectual pillar that allows the development of think tank industry. In this respect, after the collapse of the USSR, Armenia inherited quite significant resources, i.e. strong scientific potential, leading academic system, and advanced scientific infrastructure. For example, it is worth mentioning that in 1989 in the sphere of science of Soviet Armenia, more than 47 thousand people were employed<sup>29</sup>. Meantime, dozens of powerful research institutes operated in the

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<sup>27</sup> Jezierska, K. (2020). Three Types of Denial: Think Tanks as a Reluctant Civil Society Elite. *Politics and Governance*, 8 (3): 152–161. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v8i3.3015>

<sup>28</sup> Chankseliani, M., Lovakov, A. and Pislyakov, V. (2021). A big picture: bibliometric research of academic publications from post-Soviet countries. *Scientometrics*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-021-04124-5>

<sup>29</sup> State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia. (1991). *The national economy of the Armenian SSR in 1989, Statistical Yearbook of Armenia*. Yerevan. <https://www.armstat.am/file/doc/99507078.pdf> (Accessed 10 August, 2021). (In Armenian).

system of the National Academy of Sciences and under various ministries and government agencies.

However, despite such an impressive scientific potential, the process of research institutions establishing of public policy in newly independent Armenia was rather slow and difficult, due to a number of objective and subjective factors.

As the main and interrelated factors that significantly slowed down the process of establishing of think tank sector in the country, we can highlight the following:

- Nagorno Karabakh conflict in the first half of the 1990s;
- The deep economic breakdown and socio-economic crisis caused by the transport blockade by Turkey and Azerbaijan, as well as the collapse of the USSR's common industrial system and the loss of traditional economic ties with the former Soviet Republics;
- The energy crisis, which was large because of the shutdown of the Armenian Nuclear Power Plant, which reopened only in the mid-1990s;
- Loss of traditional scientific ties due to the collapse of the USSR shared scientific-educational complex;
- Extremely insufficient funding for science, which, by the way, has remained low so far;
- Weak involvement in the international scientific network;
- The complicated process of establishing a market economy, democratic institutions, the formation of state authorities;
- The peculiarity of the political culture, which was still endowed with inertial manifestations typical of the Soviet system, etc.

The difficult socioeconomic situation of newly independent Armenia, followed by an acute reduction in funding, harmed the academic system. The number of people working in the sector of science, research and development institutions has tremendously decreased. The above-mentioned factors also explain the unprecedented “brain drain” that began in the country during the first years of independence, the dangerously large volumes of which threatened national security. It is not accidental that the first document on “National Security Strategy of the Republic of Armenia” adopted yet in 2007, specifically mentioned the issue of “brain drain”, and the drain of educational and scientific potential was considered a threat<sup>30</sup>.

Moreover, the flow of scientific migration from Armenia had two main directions, which can be conventionally called “Northern” i.e. to Russia, and some other former Soviet Republics in more favorable socio-economic conditions than Armenia, and “Western” i.e. to North America and European Union (EU) countries.

Apparently, the Armenian ruling elite of those years was aware of the existing difficulties, yet the existential threats, which were mainly related to ensuring national security, in particular, the ongoing Nagorno Karabakh conflict and its aftermath, dictated the political elite completely different priorities. At the same time, as a result of the ineffective actions of the government, Armenia's

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<sup>30</sup> National Security Strategy of the Republic of Armenia. (2007). “*Haykakan Banak*”, The Special Issue.



industrial potential was basically demolished, which was largely interconnected with research and development, thus significantly hindering the process of modernization of the economy in the following years.

During that difficult period for Armenia, many international and foreign foundations became interested in the scientific potential of the country. Of particular interest are the scientific researches, including in the sphere of social sciences, conducted by Armenian scholars under the request, sponsorship or grants of these institutions, which were estimated significantly less than it could cost in many other countries. In addition, the thematic areas of such researches were largely in the interests of the external client; they could not always coincide with Armenia's social, economic, academic, security and political agenda priorities. However, such funding partially allowed Armenian researchers to continue working at least by profession, to have a stable income, which to some extent, albeit for a limited number of professionals, alleviated the difficult socio-economic situation, and actually helped not to lose completely the country's scientific potential<sup>31</sup>.

Nevertheless, it is in those years that the first institutes operating in the format of think tanks began to appear in Armenia, the number of which gradually increased in the following years. In this context, the observation of Mark Sandle is worth attention, who singles out several reasons for the creation and spread of such institutions in post-Soviet countries.

- A sharp reduction in public funding for the National Academy of Sciences, which pushed talented scientists to set up their own think tanks or replenish new ones;
- External funding by Western foundations and agencies aimed at civil society establishment, in particular for the establishment of independent research institutes;
- The increased competition and fragmentation, especially in the new political and economic conditions, the replacement of virtual 'monopolies' of expertise with a more competitive environment;
- The increasing complexity of management, as well as the development of policies to create viable economies and political systems in the post-Soviet era, created a demand for expertise that governments were unable to address<sup>32</sup>.

In the context of the discussion of the current state of the think tanks in Armenia, it is possible to present the typological diversity of these institutions. In total, there are currently 33 think tanks in Armenia that can be divided into four main types: independent, university affiliated, government affiliated, and political party affiliated, the quantitative indicators of which are shown in Table 1.

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<sup>31</sup> **Atoyan, V.** (2016). The industry of "think tanks" in Armenia. *National Strategy Issues*, 4 (37): 158-176. (In Russian).

<sup>32</sup> **Sandle, M.** (2004). Think tanks, post communism and democracy in Russia and Central and Eastern Europe. In *Think Tank Traditions: Policy Research and the Politics of Ideas*, edited by D. Stone and A. Denham, 121-137. Manchester: Manchester University Press.



Table 1

*Categories of Think Tanks Affiliations*

<i>Category</i>	<i>Number of Think Tanks</i>
Autonomous and Independent	23
University affiliated	5
Government affiliated	4
Political party affiliated	1
Total	33

Hereby we can add that despite numerous announcements by a number of political parties in recent years about the intention to establish affiliated think tanks, the implementation has not yet been noticed. The only institution currently operating in Armenia that can claim the title of such a think tank, is Hrayr Marukhyan Foundation established in 2009 by the Supreme Council of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) as a social democratic think tank. However, the public activities of this institution do not either stand out yet with the stable, visible activity typical of similar institutions abroad.

The monitoring of the Armenian think tank sector shows that since the restoration of independence, dozens of institutions have been formally established in the country, the activities of which are close to the think tanks. However, most of them existed either exclusively in a formal form, or had a short period of real activity, after which they became inoperative or ceased to exist and closed down altogether. At present, the situation, in general, has not changed essentially either; most of the functioning think tanks do not stand out with active, steadily growing public activity. There are so-called “one man think tanks”, where the director or founder of the institution is the only expert and the only one who is active in the public and expert sphere. Such institutions sometimes serve simply as the “intellectual packaging” of a particular person in order to be more presentable in the public sphere.

Another peculiarity of the sphere of think tanks in Armenia is that the think tanks are highly concentrated in the capital Yerevan: 31 out of 33 monitored institutions are located there, i.e. about 94% of the total number. Meanwhile, 25 or about 76% of the think tanks currently operating in Armenia have been established since 2000. This phenomenon can be explained by the following main reasons:

- Together with the improvement of the socio-economic situation in the country, the gradual expansion of the financial resources and opportunities necessary for the activities of such institutions;
- Expanding domestic, especially foreign grant opportunities; developing a culture of participating in such programs;
- Some establishment and strengthening of state, civil and democratic institutions;
- Internationalization and increasing the level of integration into international expert networks;
- Expanding Internet access and activating socialization in the Internet domain;

- Some increase in the interest of the political elite in the ideas and intellectual product of the think tanks and expert advice<sup>33</sup>.

Though the situation in the think tanks sphere in Armenia has been gradually improving over the last two decades<sup>34</sup>, and more favorable conditions were created for the development of think tanks, the Second Nagorno Karabakh War in 2020, and political crisis, national security challenges and serious economic difficulties, plus the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 epidemic, and the health, economic, social and psychological consequences, have created a new situation and new realities in Armenia. All this has a direct negative effect on think tanks, the consequences of which are uncertain in the long run, and difficult to predict.

As for the expert potential of the think tanks of Armenia, about 380 experts are permanently involved in the staff of the observed think tanks. However, this number does not reflect the full picture. In some think tanks, visiting experts are also involved in various research projects on a non-permanent basis. For example, the AMBERD Research Center of the Armenian State University of Economics, in addition to 12 permanent staff members, employs about 60 visiting experts each year on a temporary, up to a 6-month contract for various research. Table 2 presents the quantitative picture of the experts permanently working in Armenian think tanks.

Table 2

#### Number of Experts in Think Tanks

Category of Think Tank	Number of Experts
Government affiliated	175
Autonomous and Independent	143
University affiliated	60
Total	378

Another feature of Armenian think tanks is that most of the independent think tanks in Armenia are legally registered as nonprofit non-governmental organizations and rarely as foundations.

The issue of recognition of Armenian think tanks in various political and public circles is also considered an important factor that should be discussed. In general, most of the think tanks in Armenia are little known to the mass media, political circles, and sometimes even academics. As Yevgenya Jenny Paturyan notes, “Armenian think tanks remain virtually unknown to the public, including such important segments of the public as journalists, students, scholars, and others who would clearly benefit from think tank generated, systematised and stored information”<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> Atoyán, V. (2016). The industry of “think tanks” in Armenia. *National Strategy Issues*, 4 (37): 158-176. (In Russian).

<sup>34</sup> Atoyán, V. (2018). Are Armenian Political Elites Opening up to Think Tanks?. *On Think Tanks*. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3865724> (Accessed 20 July, 2021).

<sup>35</sup> Paturyan, Y.J. (2015). Think Tanks in Armenia: Who Needs their Thinking?. *On Think Tanks*. <https://onthinktanks.org/articles/think-tanks-in-armenia-who-needs-their-thinking/> (Accessed June 15, 2021).

The low level of recognition of the think tanks of Armenia can be explained by some interrelated possible reasons:

- Insufficient financial resources for sustainable development, proper use of public relations (PR) and marketing tools, which also causes the insufficient activity of the institution in the sphere of information and public platforms;
- Sometimes insufficient efficiency of think tanks management;
- Insufficient financial resources to engage professional experts and analysts;
- Underestimation of the importance of think tanks by other policy actors and decision-makers;
- Extremely limited involvement of think tanks in the decision-making process.

Regarding the issue of funding for think tanks, it should be noted that while government affiliated and university affiliated think tanks are often able to provide sustainable funding from the state and university's budget respectively, the situation is somewhat different for independent think tanks. The latter rely mostly on external funding, mainly on grants from foreign organizations, and to a lesser extent on domestic sources. This is confirmed by the Caucasus Institute research, which also addresses funding issues in this sphere<sup>36</sup>.

In the current reality, after the completion of the external grant program, such organizations are forced to slow down the operations until the next grant is received, or in some cases, they are closed down altogether. Such an unstable financial situation also hinders the strategic development of think tanks. On the other hand, with the low level of cooperation with national actors, the research agenda of Armenian think tanks, in general, is formed abroad, as grant programs are usually given to projects that are of interest to the relevant foreign institution<sup>37</sup>.

As for the research interests of the Armenian think tanks, the monitoring of the publications of the official websites shows mainly the following thematic preferences:

- Democratization, civil society and human rights;
- Conflicts and regional security issues (South Caucasus and neighboring countries, Middle East);
- Economic issues;
- European Union and Eurasian Economic Union integration processes;
- Education and youth issues.

Another circumstance should be mentioned, which is often essential for the normal development of the think tanks: the tradition of philanthropy, which has not yet been formed in Armenia, especially in this sector. Significant evidence of this phenomenon is the World Donation Ranking Report. Thus, in the published

<sup>36</sup> Iskandaryan, A., and Dafflon, D. eds. (2011). *An Assessment of Research Capacities in Social Sciences and Humanities in Armenia*. Caucasus Institute Research Papers: 4, Yerevan: Caucasus Institute.

<sup>37</sup> Atoyán, V. (2021). The role of think tanks in integration processes. *Science. Culture. Society*, 27(3): 10. <https://doi.org/10.19181/nko.2021.27.3.1> (In Russian).

record of 2019, which covers 126 countries, Armenia ranks only 114th in terms of donation<sup>38</sup>. This issue is important by the fact that in many countries, think tanks often raise funding for research, not only by grants, research requests, and the sale of intellectual products, but they also receive donations from various organizations or individuals. Normally, the share of income from the above-mentioned sources varies in different institutions, yet it is also logical that the think tanks attempt to diversify their financial sources in order to avoid dependence on just one source.

In the context of the above, it should be noted that the financial flows of independent think tanks in Armenia remain one of the most difficult issues to analyze. The Armenian think tanks often do not publicly share such information, and information on financial statements in open, public sources is very limited. The monitoring of the official websites of the think tanks shows that the financial statements of the latter are more often missing or are a few years old.

As for the insufficient activity of Armenian think tanks in the sphere of information, it should be stated that most Armenian think tanks have an official website on the Internet, but most of them rarely update the information on their pages. At the same time, Armenian think tanks are mostly represented on Facebook, where they have an official page. However, most of these pages are not active enough. In other social networks, Armenian think tanks' presence is generally much more limited. In result, insufficient information accompanying the activities of think tanks affects the level of visibility, recognition and impact on public opinion of these organizations.

In general, think tanks in Armenia do not have enough institutional channels to convey their ideas to the political elite. The impact of think tanks on the process of shaping the political reality is not so evident. Furthermore, the intellectual product of many Armenian think tanks is not yet sufficiently focused on practical and actual issues. On the other hand, the insufficient demand for think tanks research outputs in the political market does not contribute to the development of a competitive environment in this sector, which could have a positive impact on the quality of work management.

Evidently, in the changing realities of the 21st century, in order to grab the attention of the public and especially the political elite, it is necessary that the research outputs and publications of the think tanks meet the requirements of the decision-makers, be non-extensive, targeted, of a practical nature, suitable for reading. If necessary, think tanks should be able to design various scenario cases, give practical proposals, prepare policy recommendations, thereby creating appropriate demand among decision-makers. Many think tanks in Armenia are not yet sufficiently functioning in this manner and do not regularly produce such intellectual products of the required frequency. Some think tanks focus on publishing extensive work, which, however, is mostly used in basic science or in the case of classical academic institutions. At the same time, as already mentioned, Armenian think tanks generally do not make sufficient use of

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<sup>38</sup> CAF World Giving Index. (2019). [https://www.cafonline.org/docs/default-source/about-us-publications/caf\\_wgi\\_10th\\_edition\\_report\\_2712a\\_web\\_101019.pdf](https://www.cafonline.org/docs/default-source/about-us-publications/caf_wgi_10th_edition_report_2712a_web_101019.pdf) (Accessed 12 July, 2021).

PR and social media marketing (SMM) tools and are not able to effectively promote their own ideas and research outputs in the media sphere, on public platforms, with the society or decision-makers.

Another reason for the current situation is the low level of cooperation with the legislative and executive powers, the political culture in the decision-making process, where the expert community has not traditionally been sufficiently involved. In this respect, there are some positive trends in the last two decades, but in general, the situation in this direction has not changed radically so far. It can be stated that the policy-making process in Armenia is rather closed<sup>39</sup>, and think tanks have limited resources to reach decision-makers<sup>40</sup>.

In this sense, it is important to mention that the challenges in the sphere of foreign and domestic policy in the 21st century and changing realities are distinguished by their complexity and multi-layering, which significantly complicates the decision-making process for the political elite. In this regard, the involvement of the expert community in the decision-making process, which should be of a permanent, institutionalized nature, can be of great benefit in increasing the effectiveness of policies developed and implemented in various spheres. Moreover, the lack of interaction and cooperation with think tanks may, in some cases, create risks for the formation of unbalanced or polarized stereotypes in society. For example, in the decision-making process, public administration representatives are often not seen as objective parties. In this case, some of the decisions made by the latter have the problem of public legitimacy, and in this process, the think tanks and the expert community can also play a huge role. By the way, the use of this tool is typical not only for some Western countries, but also, for example, for China, and it is not accidental that in recent years the political elite of that country has greatly supported the establishment and development of the think tank industry<sup>41</sup>. Surprisingly, in this case, the problem may not be related to the legitimacy of the ruling elite itself but can be related to make some of its decisions more perceptible and acceptable to the public, especially when those decisions may be necessary, yet not popular, or have significant importance in terms of changes in foreign or domestic policy in some field.

The level of influence of the Armenian think tanks can be determined by another indicator of the government's approach in this sector. It is well known that in many countries, especially in the United States, the principle of the so-called "revolving door" has become widely used, when former government officials, including high-ranking officials, politicians move to the industry of ideas,

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<sup>39</sup> Gutbrod, H. (2015), The Lay of the Land: An interview with Hans Gutbrod on think tanks in the South Caucasus. *On Think Tanks*. <https://onthinktanks.org/articles/the-lay-of-the-land-an-interview-with-hans-gutbrod-on-think-tanks-in-the-south-caucasus/> (Accessed June 10, 2021).

<sup>40</sup> Gilbreath, D. (2015). Thinking about Think Tanks in the South Caucasus: A New Series. *On Think Tanks*. <https://onthinktanks.org/articles/thinking-about-think-tanks-in-the-south-caucasus-a-new-series/> (Accessed June 12, 2021).

<sup>41</sup> See, Köllner, P., Zhu, X., & Abb, P. (2018). Understanding the development of think tanks in mainland China, Taiwan, and Japan. *Pacific Affairs*, 91 (1): 5-26. <https://doi.org/10.5509/20189115>; Zhang, D. (2021). The media and think tanks in China: The construction and propagation of a think tank. *Media Asia*, 48 (2): 123-138. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01296612.2021.1899785>

academia, expertise, leading or joining the staffs of think tanks. On the other hand, after the change of government, experts and analysts from other think tanks are invited to work in the sector of public administration. With this approach, the synergy of knowledge based on the practical and research experience of professionals involved in the sector of public administration and think tanks can have a significant positive effect on both the development of the think tank industry and the effectiveness of the public policy. This approach also facilitates the exchange of ideas, experiences, between governmental and non-governmental institutions, and strengthens cooperation between them. In this regard, a goal-oriented and consistent policy in this direction has not been implemented so far. Although there have been some precedents when experts from Armenian think tanks have been invited to public administration or appointed to diplomatic positions, this has been of a very individual, non-systemic nature. Meantime, high-ranking officials in Armenia rarely join the staffs of existing think tanks after leaving office.

Furthermore, the so-called Legacy-based think tanks, which are usually set up by the retired heads of state or former high-ranking officials, are not common in Armenia. None of the three former presidents of Armenia has yet established such an institution. There are also no think tanks set up by former prime ministers. As for the former ministers, it is worth mentioning the Armenian Center for National and International Studies founded in 1994 by the first Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia Raffi Hovannisian (1991-1992). Though the latter was much more active and noticeable in the first decade of its existence, but the institute has been still operating so far<sup>42</sup>.

It may be concluded that the think tank industry in Armenia is not yet fully formed. There are many issues, including the low level of institutional cooperation with the legislative and executive powers, the lack of philanthropy, weak financial resources, and their non-diversification, insufficient inclusiveness of the decision-making process, the limited activity of think tanks in the information domain and sometimes the lack of professional expert resource. In general, the Armenian think tanks have a relatively weak influence on public policy, in particular on the decision-making process.

The issue of ensuring financial resources and financial stability remains an “Achilles’ heel” for Armenian think tanks, which has a significant impact on the development of this sector. Furthermore, in some cases, the operation of think tanks is to some extent detached from the priorities of the state. In this regard, the possible solution to the above-mentioned issue is ensuring the continuous development of the think tanks, and it depends not only on the political system or political culture but also on the country's modernization and economic success. The economic development of the country can lay the ground for the expansion of domestic funding sources for think tanks.

The development of the sector can also be significantly influenced by the initiative of the political elite, which can develop appropriate institutional mechanisms for cooperation with them to ensure greater involvement of think

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<sup>42</sup> **Atoyan, V.** (2020). Legacy-based Think Tanks. *AMBERD Bulletin*, 4 (5): 67-74. (In Armenian)

tanks in public policy. This, in its turn, can have a positive impact on the strengthening of the country's democratic system, the development of civil society institutions, as well as significantly increase the effectiveness decisions made in domestic and foreign policy, support the think tanks to use their ideas and expertise more effectively to face the many challenges the country and society is facing, and to solve issues of strategic importance.

**Conclusions.** In the 21st century, the need for the use of soft power tools is steadily increasing. The methods of fighting for the “hearts and minds” of the people are being improved. In this context, think tanks are considered as unique intellectual platforms to discuss the above-mentioned issues and various other issues related to public policy research, generate strategic ideas. In some cases, think tanks also turn into important players of domestic and foreign policy; in domestic policy, contributing to the solution of problems in various spheres, and in foreign policy, projecting the soft power of the state and supporting official diplomacy by the tools of Track II Diplomacy. Meanwhile, in transition countries such as Armenia, think tanks often do not have favorable conditions for effective functioning. However, as Eric C Johnson rightly points out, “in countries where democracy is a new phenomenon, the role of think tanks in stimulating the flow of ideas is even more important.”<sup>43</sup> Moreover, for Armenia, which is at the stage of facing various geopolitical, economic, demographic, and security challenges, overcoming another difficult period in its history, the development of the think tank industry is gaining additional importance.

The current transformations in public and political life and in the global environment are essentially changing the procedures and approaches of decision-making and policy implementation in the sphere of public policy too, meanwhile presenting issues on the regulation of mentioned change. Due to this, the number of relating researches on the issues of elaboration, preparation, adoption, public legitimacy, and the process of their implementation in academic community is gradually increasing. In this regard, think tanks can play a significant role in increasing the effectiveness of decisions in public policy, as well as in building a positive public attitude towards decision-making through professional and reasoned activities. Think tanks can serve as a unique platform for promoting a culture of dialogue by providing a link between the government, academia, business communities, and civil society involved in the political process. At the same time, think tanks' role in connecting the social, political, and academic layers of society creates unique opportunities for the formation of collective approaches, programs, strategic vision, public solidarity, and consensus decisions to solve various public policy issues. As Åberg, Einarsson, and Reuter rightly point out, “think tanks can provide the public debate with something that no one else can: ideologically grounded, realistic, and far-sighted policy advice”<sup>44</sup>.

<sup>43</sup> Johnson, E.C. (1996). How Think Tanks Improve Public Policy. *Economic Reform Today*, 3: 34-38.

<sup>44</sup> Åberg, P., Einarsson, S., and Reuter, M. (2020). Organizational Identity of Think Tank(er)s: A Growing Elite Group in Swedish Civil Society. *Politics and Governance*, 8 (3): 142-151. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v8i3.3086>



The advantage of independent think tanks over analytical structures in public administration is also remarkable since in practice think tanks operate more freely than the structures somehow constrained by hierarchical and, other formal or informal relations, links, and impacts of the state bureaucratic system. The comparatively free status of think tank researchers allows for bolder, more objective, creative, non-standard, flexible, and alternative approaches to problem-solving.

As discussed above, independent think tanks operating in modern format have begun to form in Armenia too, since its independence. After the collapse of the USSR, Armenia inherited a strong scientific potential, a well-developed academic system, and advanced infrastructure, which are the main workshops for training think tank professionals. Still, the process of establishing think tanks in Armenia has been rather slow and complicated, due to various factors, such as financial difficulties of the country (that hinder the establishment of think tank funding sources within the country), insufficient level of requesting researches, low level of development of philanthropic traditions, as well as the peculiarities of political culture, including the very limited cooperation of think tanks with the legislative and executive powers and the business sector.

In the early days of independent statehood, weak democratic institutions and inherited political culture developed a decision-making model in which other actors of public policy were not involved or, in very rare cases, their involvement had no significant impact on creating the overall picture. The dialogue and the link between the political elite, expert community, business and society were not at a respective level, which was a serious obstacle for the development of the newly established think tanks. All this has left its mark on the whole further development of think tanks in Armenia. It can be stated that in Armenia the influence of the think tanks on the formation of the public policy agenda, in general, is not so significant. Moreover, a lot of the Armenian think tanks still have the problem of becoming more visible, conspicuous and recognizable, which is partly because they do not have the required resources to ensure stable activity and to practice PR and SMM tools, or that resources are quite scarce. As a result, the informational coverage of the activities of the Armenian think tanks is mainly insufficient, which significantly limits the development of these institutions and their impact on public policy.

It is worthy to mention that the intellectual product of the Armenian think tanks is not often sufficiently aimed at solving practical problems, including in terms of provided format and content. As a result of the lack of internal resources, the activities of many think tanks in Armenia are highly dependent on foreign donors, and the necessary funds to ensure sustainable activity remain the “Achilles’ heel” of these institutions. At the same time, the target theme of grants or research requests received from abroad does not always coincide with the agenda, priorities, and challenges facing the country, which significantly weakens the attention of the political elite and the society to research outputs of think tanks. The lack of internal funding equivalent to external funding actually creates a certain imbalance in the targeted agenda of think tank activities. In this context, the increment of funding opportunities for think tanks within the country,

including the development of a research request culture, the promotion of philanthropy, supporting the creation of endowments to support the sustainable operation of think tanks, and developing effective mechanisms for collaboration among the government, a business sector, and expert community can significantly improve the situation in think tank industry.

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## ՎԱՐԴԱՆ ԱԹՈՅԱՆ

Հայաստանի պետական տնտեսագիտական համալսարանի  
հասարակագիտության ամբիոնի վարիչ, քաղաքական գիտությունների դոկտոր

**Ուղեղային կենտրոնների ոլորտի ձևավորումը Հայաստանում.** – Հոդվածում ներկայացված են Հայաստանի ուղեղային կենտրոնների ոլորտի ուսումնասիրության արդյունքները: Վերլուծվում են անկախության ձեռքբերումից ի վեր Հայաստանի ուղեղային կենտրոնների ծագման և ոլորտի զարգացման ընթացքը, նաև վերջինիս ձևավորմանն ու լիարժեք կայացմանը խոչընդոտող հիմնական գործոնները: Քննարկվում է ոլորտում առկա իրավիճակը, ներկայացվում են Հայաստանում դրա առանձնահատկությունները, այդ թվում՝ ուղեղային կենտրոնների քանակական և տիպաբանական լանդշաֆտը: Հեղինակն անդրադարձել է նաև Հայաստանի հանրային քաղաքականությունում ուղեղային կենտրոնների դերին և ազդեցությանը, ինչպես նաև որոշում կայացնողների հետ փոխգործակցության խնդիրներին: Եզրակացության մեջ ուրվագծվում են որոշակի մոտեցումներ, որոնց կիրառումը կարող է դրական նշանակություն ունենալ և խթանել Հայաստանում ուղեղային կենտրոնների ոլորտի զարգացումը:

**Հիմնաբառեր.** Հայաստան, ուղեղային կենտրոններ, գաղափարների շուկա, հանրային քաղաքականություն, հեղափոխական կենտրոններ

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## ВАРДАН АТОЯН

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**Формирование сферы фабрик мысли в Армении.** – В статье представлены результаты исследования сферы фабрик мысли (мозговых центров, аналитических центров) Армении. Анализируется процесс возникновения и развития данной индустрии с момента обретения Арменией независимости, а также основные факторы, препятствующие развитию и полноценному становлению этой сферы. Отражена текущая ситуация и выявлены особенности данной сферы в Армении, включая количественный и типологический ландшафт фабрик мысли. Автор также затронул проблему роли и влияния фабрик мысли в публичной политике Армении, а также вопросы взаимодействия с лицами, принимающими решения. В заключении излагаются определенные подходы, применение которых может положительно повлиять и стимулировать развитие индустрии фабрик мысли в Армении.

**Ключевые слова:** Армения, фабрики мысли, мозговые центры, аналитические центры, индустрия идей, рынок идей, публичная политика, исследовательские центры

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