

Political science - Latvia

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Sammelwerksbeitrag / collection article

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Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Runcis, A. (2002). Political science - Latvia. In M. Kaase, V. Sparschuh, & A. Wenninger (Eds.), *Three social science disciplines in Central and Eastern Europe: handbook on economics, political science and sociology (1989-2001)* (pp. 275-285). Berlin: Informationszentrum Sozialwissenschaften. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-280983>

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Political Science – Latvia

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Introduction

The appearance of the academic field of political science in Latvia in the late 1980s was not the result of an exclusively autonomous scientific development. Rather, it was primarily due to major political changes in Latvian society that significantly influenced changes in education and research activities in the social sciences.

In analyzing the development of political science, first of all we must take into account the development of social thought in Latvia. The social views of the Latvian intelligentsia have generally been based on the intellectual foundations of Europe, especially 18th- and 19th-century Germany.

Inter-war period¹

The social sciences in the 1920s and 1930s in Latvia were characterized by many new accents and the names of many new thinkers, but this period can be set apart from the previous one only to a certain extent. Innovations in this era include discussions between the defenders of democracy and those who supported the ideas of authoritarianism.

The development of social ideas was helped enormously by the establishment of the University of Latvia and by the subsequent publication of its journal, *Latvijas Universitātes raksti* (Acta Universitatis Latviensis). Now the faculty of the university gradually took the lead in developing and popularizing the social sciences.

Looking at the most prominent social thinkers of this era, we must first mention those who began their activities before the proclamation of Latvia's independence: Pēteris Zālīte (1864-1939), Pauls Dāle (1889-1968), Pauls Jurevičs, Teodors Celms (1893-1989), and Robert Vipper (1859-1954). An important work by Celms was the collection of writings *Patiesība un šķitums* (The true and the seeming, 1939), which examines the structure, goals, and norms of society, as well as issues concerning the community-based lives of people. Celms believed that population growth and the increasing availability of information and the increasing speed of traffic would probably lead to an increasing role for mass movements, increasing the likelihood of social chaos. That, in turn, might facilitate increases in state power, propaganda, nationalism, and authoritarian leadership, leading to military tensions and increased international conflicts. Vipper also played an important role in the development of social thought in that era. He devoted much attention to socio-philosophical issues. In his article *Morāliskās katastrofas un morāliskās slimības Eiropas sabiedriskajā dzīvē* (Moral catastrophes and moral illnesses in European society), he wrote about scientists' responsibility in society.

Latvian thinkers in this era also devoted a great deal of attention to national issues. Artūrs Kroders analyzed the history of the Latvian intelligentsia and nationalism in his *Domas par latvju kultūru* (Thoughts on Latvian culture, Rīga 1921). The ideas of nationalism were also developed in Ernests Brastiņš' *Latviskās Latvijas labad. Mājieni un aicinājumi. 1925-1935 gadam* (For a Latvian Latvia: Hints and Recommendations for 1924-1935), in which he analyzed issues of national consciousness, nationalism, and Marxism. High scientific culture was evident in Kārlis Dišlers' article on the self-determination of nations (1932).

Most nationalist publications were written in the second half of the 1930s. During this time, a collection of writings edited by Jānis Lapiņš was published under the title *Jaunais nacionālisms* (The new nationalism, Rīga, 1937), as was a book by Kroders, *Pa Jaunās ideoloģijas ceļiem* (Along the paths of the new ideology, Rīga, 1937) that analyzed nationalism, leadership,

solidarity, and the ideas of national unity. The ideologues of Latvian nationalism opposed political liberalism and parliamentarianism, and they held collective rights to be higher than individual rights. The ideology of Latvian nationalists was not, however, typified by intolerance toward representatives of other nationalities. Rather, Latvian nationalism was characterized by a dislike of Marxism, whose propaganda championed other ideas of solidarity. Like other nationalists, the ideologues of Latvian nationalism worshiped at the altar of rural patriarchies and rural lifestyles, criticizing everything that had to do with industry.

Of separate interest are discussions about the defenders of democracy and authoritarianism. In 1927, a collection of articles was published under the title *Demokrātijas krīze* (The crisis of democracy). The publisher was the academic section of the political party, the Latvian Farmer's Union. As the title of the book suggests, the authors all believed that there was a crisis brewing in the Latvian democratic system, but they were all critical of dictatorship and Bolshevism. The crisis in democracy was primarily associated with the existence of numerous, small democratic parties in Latvia and the destructive activities of their leaders. A way out of the crisis, the authors felt, would be found in amending the country's elections law to reduce the influence of these small parties. The authors did not question democratic values, writing in one instance that the democratic crisis had to do with "the incomplete nature of its forms of implementation and the political unpreparedness of the people". Alfrēds Bērziņš analyzed Latvia's election law and Skujenieks' idea of applying a percentage barrier to parliamentary elections, which was first implemented in Latvia 60 years. A noteworthy analytical article is Kārlis Dišlers' article *Vai parlamentārisma vai demokrātijas krīze?* (A crisis of parliamentarianism or democracy), written in 1927. There were many more writings, however, in which authors praised Ulmanis' leadership cult and denigrated parliamentarianism. The position of these people is best characterized by the formula they propagated: One nation, one leader.

Also active around this time were social democrats and persons near to them. On the 50th anniversary of the death of Karl Marx, a collection of articles called "*Markss un marksisms*" (Marx and Marxism) was published by the Marxist Club of Rīga. The collection offered an analysis of Marx's views on virtually all important aspects of public life.

Specific attention should be devoted to the activities of the Academic Social Sciences Association of the University of Latvia (also known as Acquitās), which was supposed to help develop the sciences of economics, sociology, and law.

1. Analysis of the pre-1989 situation

The political and legal legacy of central one-party dominance was very influential, especially in higher education. The University of Latvia was established in 1919 only as a classical university. After "the restoration of Soviet power in Latvia", a strong centralized system was introduced to university education. In the 1950s, the University of Latvia was divided into several institutions – engineering, medicine, and agriculture.

In the Soviet Union from Brest to Sakhalin Island, subjects (political economy, the history of the CPSU, scientific communism), lectures, and seminars were taught according to the same centralized scheme and from the same textbooks. Usually all textbooks were prepared in Moscow and officially accepted by the Ministry of Education of USSR; no deviations from the official path were accepted. In the social sciences, there were no textbooks written by other authors, for example, from Latvia. The approved "textbooks" were translated into the various languages of the Soviet union, including Latvian.

Ideological disciplines were compulsory in all faculties and study programs. It was impossible to complete university studies without a final state exam in these disciplines. At the end of the 1980s, this provoked strong reactions among students, who started to refuse to take courses in these disciplines or to attend several teachers' ultra-orthodox lectures.

Latvia did not have political science at all even in before World War II. The field of political science didn't face the challenge of returning to pre-war tradition, as was the case in philosophy and sociology. Philosophy and sociology were taught in the Soviet period, and there were small scientific communities in the country. But this does not mean that political subjects were not investigated at all. They were continuously covered by representatives of other disciplines, such as law, history, sociology, economics, demography, statistics, and philosophy, but from these disciplines' viewpoints. During the period of the Soviet occupation, the social sciences were covered by all the various branches of Marxism-Leninism, which was the only authorized approach in education and research. There were no specialized departments, academic programs, periodicals, professional associations, or conferences in the field of political science in the academic history of Latvia; access to and contacts with Western researchers, books, and journals were restricted. The appearance of academic political science in Latvia in the late 1980s was not the result of an exclusively autonomous scientific development leading to a new discipline.² Liberalization of the Soviet regime in the 1980s and democratic changes brought the necessity to establish a non-ideologized academic and research discipline – political science – instead of the former ideological disciplines: the history of the CPSU, historical materialism, the political economy of Marxism-Leninism, and scientific communism.

The content of “scientific communism”, as the official political science discipline, was changed significantly at the end of the 1980s. Officially the name “scientific communism” was retained, but in reality it became less and less ideological. The study program took on new themes: social and political movements, political parties, bureaucracy, social stratification, and modern global problems. In the 1970s and 1980s, a lot of attention was paid to the issue of *Weltanschauung*. The state supported several theoretical research projects (as the “department's research topic”). Several conferences were staged and their conference proceedings published. Mikelis Asmanis at that time defended a second doctoral thesis (Dr. hab.) about *Weltanschauung* and later published a book *Formirovanije nauchnogo mirovozrenija* (The Formation of the Scientific World View, Riga, 1984). The author focused on the development of *Weltanschauung*, specific features of individual and group (or class) worldviews, and various factors that influence the development of a scientific worldview. The problem of the formation of “worldviews” was one of the basic subjects for researchers and lecturers.

One sociologist, Eduards Oziganovs, was interested in Max Weber's political theory. In the Bachelor's program, he taught a course on Western sociological theories, but research interest focused mainly on political science and sociology. He defended a PhD thesis on Max Weber and later published it as a book, *Politicheskaja teorija M. Vebera* (Political Theory of Max Weber, Rīga, 1986). This was the first theoretical book about Max Weber's political theory published in Latvia, but in Russian.

Officially, the name of the discipline “scientific communism” was retained to keep diploma records unified. So students organized a large demonstration called “the funeral of scientific communism”. The demonstration was organized as an enormous funeral service for orthodox Marxism-Leninism, accompanied by ironic slogans like “the Party, the army and the Soviet nation are forever united”, “Lenin alive forever”, “the victory of communism is inevitable”, and so on. There was a coffin full of orthodox Marxist-Leninist literature, and the students displayed pictures of Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Brezhnev, Gorbachev, and other Soviet leaders.

From the end of 1988 on, social science lecturers were quite free to choose the topics for lectures and to prepare new courses. The sudden lifting of political control encouraged lecturers to prepare new courses that did not fit the official communist platform.

2. Redefinition of the discipline since 1990

At the beginning of the 1990s, a new approach was introduced for former researchers and instructors in all, and not only social sciences. All Soviet-era researchers and instructors who had

defended a doctoral or second doctoral thesis (doctor habilitus) were required to undergo a procedure of nostrification (in Latvian – *nostrifikacija*) confirming that their theses were more than a compilation of quotations from Marxist-Leninist works. In the social sciences, several doctoral theses were not confirmed. These ideological hard-liners were expelled from universities and research institutes and had no more influence on the decision-making and research process at all. Instead, new candidates moved in. Political science had never been a research field before, so all researchers who chose political science started to do research in a completely new area. Some young researchers who finished their PhD thesis abroad chose topics about nationalism or about the influence of the political parties and political elite on democratic consolidation.

The institutionalization of political science

As the result of reform in social science in 1989, the University of Latvia established a political science department (in Latvian – *politologijas katedra*) for the first time. There were lengthy discussions and a number of proposals for a name under which to market the new discipline. The original name introduced was *politology*. There were no scientists with academic degrees in political science in Latvia at the time. In the beginning, the staff of the new department was put together from young, highly motivated teachers from the departments of scientific communism, history, law, and sociology.

The earlier extremely centralized teaching system was broken and teachers were quite free to offer courses and to choose the content of those courses. In fact, every teacher prepared his own specialized academic course, and students were free to choose because the courses were all elective. At that time, a very limited amount of Western political science books were available. But despite these difficulties, new courses were developed very fast because young teachers had the appropriate professional and analytical skills and were very open to new ideas and approaches. The first systematic course in political science for department teachers was introduced by the Latvian political scientist Rita P. Peters from the University of Massachusetts (USA).

Between 1990 and 1992, a variety of teaching materials about different political science themes were prepared and published in Latvian and Russian: political parties, social stratification, social democracy, political regimes, the history of political ideas in Latvia, and modern global problems.

The most important institutions included the Department of Political Science, University of Latvia; the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the University of Latvia; the Latvian Institute of International Affairs; Vidzeme University College; the Baltic Strategic Center; and the Center for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies. Here are the profiles of two of these institutes:

The University of Latvia, Social Science Faculty, Department of Political Science.

The Department of Political Science was established in Autumn 1989 to give the course “Introduction to Political Science” to the students of the University of Latvia. Since 1991, the Department has started work to establish a Bachelor’s study program in political science. Earlier, Latvia did not have any scientists with a university academic degree in political science at all.

A full course of major academic studies in political science was first established at the University of Latvia in 1992. The curriculum was planned by the staff of the Department of Political Science and Einars Semanis, who was at that time the head of the department of political science at the University of Latvia.

The University of Latvia is the only institution of higher education in Latvia that offers Master’s studies in political science. The academic study program leading to a Master’s degree in political science is a continuation of the Bachelor’s program, supplemented with deepened theoretical studies in the same and related sciences. The goal of studies is to provide possibilities for Master’s candidates to follow the latest achievements of political science and to teach skills of theoretical analysis and research work, as well as to impart the necessary knowledge for the objective analysis of current political events on the basis of thorough theoretical knowledge.

From the very beginning, the Department of Political Science has moved toward gaining international experience and introducing that experience into the Department's activity. There was little experience with political science in Latvian society at the beginning of the 1990s. So links on the international level were established, and long-term partners were found to help develop political science in Latvia and to ensure that the quality of academic and research work met the requirements of contemporary science.

A major step toward quality was taken in 1992 when the Department of Political Science started to participate in the TEMPUS project "Political Science in the Baltic States" (partner universities: University of Aarhus, Denmark; Swansea University College, United Kingdom; Umea University, Sweden). The direct aim of this project was to prepare Bachelor's study programs that would meet international standards. All lecturers of the Department took part in training and re-qualification programs, including at least two semesters as students in Western universities. In 1995, the Department of Political Science received a proposal from Brussels Free University (Andre Miror) to join an already existing TEMPUS project aimed at strengthening the program "international politics".

Vidzeme University College, Department of Political Science

Vidzeme University College was founded in 1997 to maintain a higher educational program in political science, economics, tourism, and communication. The study program comprises the four most significant political science subdivisions: political theory, comparative politics, international relations, and public administration. Because of the practical focus of the political science program, special attention is paid to public administration studies. In addition, students are offered optional courses (about 11% of the total amount) that focus on various specific issues. 46 students were enrolled in the political science program in 1999. Bilateral relations: Vidzeme University College's main cooperation partner has been Lillehammer University College (Norway). Its faculty actively participated in developing Vidzeme University College's study programs. The exchange of teachers is an important element for ensuring study quality.

3. Core theoretical and methodological orientations

More than 50 years of Soviet occupation and Marxist-Leninist ideological dominance changed intellectual discussion. At the end of the 1990s, some pre-war ideas were used when the independence issue was discussed. Pre-war tradition was used mainly in the context of discussions about the Constitution (Satversme) and electoral law. Some ideas about the national issue were discussed, but the international and geopolitical situation differed from that of the inter-war period, so new Western ideas about multicultural society were put on the agenda.

From the beginning to the middle of the 1990s, the quantitative approach dominated in political science, especially in research on political elites, political parties, and electoral behavior. From the middle of the 1990s on, more attention was paid to the qualitative approach, because more and more sociologists used this method and political scientists used the data to explain various political phenomena, for example citizen attitudes toward electoral system change and toward having the state president elected by all the people.

4. Thematic orientation and funding

First contacts with Western researchers were made in 1989 and 1990 when the first Latvian political scientists from the USA came to the University of Latvia and introduced some basic approaches and theories. That was the first impact. The second came when the first researchers and instructors from the University of Latvia went to the University of Oslo (Norway) and Aarhus University (Denmark) as students or guest researchers. The first joint research projects with researchers from the Department of Political Science at the University of Oslo started.

The main research projects in the beginning of the 1990s were “The Baltic States on the Road to Democracy”, conducted in cooperation with the Baltic and Nordic governments; “The Latvian Elite in the transitional period”, a joint University of Latvia and University of Oslo project; “Parliamentary Government in Latvia”, a joint University of Latvia and University of Oslo (Project Balticum) project; “Electoral Behavior in Latvia”; “Democratization in Latvia”; “Public Support for Education”; and “The Political Process in Latvia since the Restoration of Independence”.

First themes were proposed by Western researchers. From the middle of the 1990s on, researchers and instructors chose themes in their own way and the main topics were the political elite, political parties, electoral behavior, and local government reform. The ethnic composition of Latvian society, the geopolitical situation, and internal and external security issues were the key points. A lot of research was done on multicultural society, civil society, and the integration of society. Research in the field of international relations was mostly devoted to the regional security issue. Especially active in this field was the Latvian Institute of International Affairs (Latvijas Ārpolitikas institūtes).

One project, *Ethnicity and Politics in Baltic States*, was carried out in Oslo with support from the University of Oslo (Steen, 1997). The research reports were put together in an anthology. The purpose of the anthology was to analyze how ethnic structure in the three Baltic states has resulted in rather different social and political responses. Several topics were covered: elites and democratic development, inter-ethnic communication, political participation, institutional constraints in the implementation of citizenship rights in Latvia, common national identity among Latvians and Russians, and integrative politics.

Private vs. public funding

After the collapse of the Soviet union during the transition period, all research institutes and universities faced severe financial problems. But from the beginning of the 1990s on, the Latvian Academy of Sciences and the government introduced a completely new funding system, the grant system. All the sciences received a certain amount of money – some more, some less. The new procedure introduced project competition; for example, political science was in a group together with sociology and psychology. Neutral experts evaluated every project. The Science Council made the final decision. Another source of funding was carrying out joint projects with Western universities or research centers.

The Soros Fund Latvia supported various projects, exerting extremely strong influence in the field of private funding. In the beginning, the Soros Fund Latvia supported the translation of classical books in political science into Latvian, but it later started to support research projects. The latest Soros Fund Latvia initiative is the establishment of a new Internet portal – politika (politika). Recent research topics have been about latent political propaganda in the mass media before elections and about responsible politics – the reform of the electoral system and the procedure of electing the State President.

The Latvian Institute of International Affairs functions only on the basis of funding from Western countries – Sweden, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, etc. The profile of this institute:

The Latvian Institute of International Affairs

The Latvian Institute of International Affairs (LIIA) carries out research in the field of regional security in the Baltic Sea region. Many projects have been done in cooperation with Swedish social scientists (Arteus, Gunnar and Atis, Lejiņš, 1997). Cooperation between the Latvijas Ārpolitikas institūtes and the Forsvarshogskolans strategiska institution (FHS/SI, the Department of Strategic Studies at the National Defense College of Sweden) has taken various forms, including an international conference in Jurmala from June 14-16, 1997.

The changes since 1989 in the strategic map of the Baltic Sea region have been revolutionary. The Baltic Sea region emerged as a new component in the building of a new European security order. The Baltic Sea region today is a meeting place for many different organizational and

national interests: NATO, the European Union, the WEU, and Nordic, Baltic, Russian and Polish national interests. The purpose of this analysis is to highlight the main security concerns of Latvia six years after independence was restored in 1991. The main question that we attempt to answer is: To what degree has the Latvian state succeeded in fulfilling its goal of securing the “irreversibility of restored independence” as defined in Latvia’s foreign policy concept?

Local grants, international projects and contract work, and various highly rated international scholarships appeared: the British Council stipends, NATO Individual or Institutional Grants, the Research Council of Norway Scholarships, Volkswagen Foundation stipends, and Fulbright Fellowships.

5. Public space and academic debates

The political science community is rather small in Latvia, with only few a dozen political scientists doing research and teaching. The main debated themes are ethnic and citizenship issues and security issues. The principal academic journals include *Humanities and Social Sciences Latvia*, the *Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences*, and *Latvian History*.

The German-Latvian Social Science Center (Deutsch-Lettisches Sozialwissenschaftliches Zentrum in Riga – DeLaSSC; the leader of the project is Professor Manfred Kerner from the Free University Berlin) was established in 1997 with financial support from the Volkswagen Fund.

Since 2001, Eurofaculty has offered a small grant for research in public administration. The purpose of this grant is to involve graduate students in carrying out various projects together with senior researchers.

Research contacts have been established largely on the basis of participation at international conferences and seminars or of joint projects started from in teaching context and later continued in research. Several teachers have lectured at foreign universities.

6. Views on further development

Political science is one of the most popular specialties in Latvia and the number of persons who wish to pursue this field of study is constantly increasing. Since Latvia is becoming more and more involved in international processes, especially in the context of the EU and of the related expansion of political operations within the country, there will be an increasing demand for thoroughly trained professionals with specialized knowledge.

European affairs is an important field, given Latvia’s rapid movement toward the EU – a process that dictates the need for a greater range of specialists who are involved in these matters. The role of this specialization will increase all the more once Latvia becomes a member of the EU, when Latvian citizens will have to become involved in resolving EU-related issues at the national, regional, and all-Union level.

The Social Science Database (Socialo zinatnu datu baze), at the Academy of Sciences, was established in 1996 by Aivars Tabuns with financial support from the Latvian Science Council. Political science studies are very popular in Latvia. Since 1992, this study program has been among the programs that have received the most applications for studies. Political scientists and even political science students are involved in political activities.

The career opportunities for graduates in political science are good, because society lacks this kind of specialists. They work in governmental institutions, private organizations, or NGOs.

¹ Tabuns, Aivars. *Sociology in Latvia: yesterday, today and tomorrow. Humanities and Social Sciences Latvia*. 4(13)/96; 1(14)/97, 7.-64.

- ² Semanis, E. Academic Political Science in Latvia: The First Steps, *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol.17, No.2, 181-192.

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Table 1 Department of Political Science, Social Science Faculty, University of Latvia

Year of foundation	1989
Professional staff	5 professors 2 associate professors 4 lecturers 3 assistants 8 part-time lecturers
Academic degrees awards by Department	BA & MA & PhD in Political Science

Table 2 Department of Political Science, Vidzemes University College

Year of foundation	1996
Professional staff	3 associate professors 4 assistants
Academic degrees awarded by College	BA in Political Science

Table 3 European Integration Institute, Department of Political Science, Medical Academy of Latvia/Riga Stradins University

Year of foundation	1998
Professional staff	2 associate professors 15 docents
Academic degrees awarded by Institute	BA in Political Science

Table 4 Major Theoretical Approaches in Political Science

	DPS, University of Latvia	DPS, Vidzemes University College	EII, DPS, ACU/RSU
Methodology of Political science	X	X	X
Political theory	X	X	X
Political philosophy	X		
Political economy	X		
Comparative politics	X	X	X
International politics	X	X	X
International organizations	X		X
Transitology	X		X
Political parties, interest groups	X		
Elections, electoral systems	X		X
Political sociology	X		
Public policy and public administration	X	X	
Organizational theory	X	X	X
Marxism			
Game theory	X		
Functionalism	X		X
Behaviorism	X		X
Rational choice	X		X
System theory			
Existentialism			
Phenomenology			
Hermeneutics			