



Bilim Akademisi – the New Science Academy in Turkey

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In August 2011 the Turkish Government issued a decree to bring in government appointments to the Turkish Academy of Sciences (TÜBA). This resulted in an appointed majority of members in TÜBA, many with mediocre academic records. 52 of the 82 formerly elected regular members of TÜBA resigned. A new academy, [Bilim Akademisi – the Science Academy](#) was founded on Nov. 25, 2011. These developments took place in a background of increasing political interference in publicly funded institutions as well as professional associations, non-governmental organizations and the media. Many academies throughout the world receive support from public funds. They are accountable financially but are independent in their academic and scientific activities, including, fundamentally, the election of their members. Academies and scientific societies can function as sources of reference and advice to the public and to governments on the basis of this independence.

The universities system in Turkey is centralized, rigid and hierarchical. There are constraints on academic freedom which have led to an increasing number of investigations and court cases in recent years. Science policy is shaped by the misconception of developing or adopting technology while downplaying basic scientific research. This goes hand in hand with an ideological distrust of science by the present government.

The Science Academy was set up as a Society under Turkish Law, financed by members' dues and donations so as to be independent of any state support. It now has 121 members, of which 29 are physicists. Ordinary members are Turkish citizens elected on the basis of academic excellence who sign a Declaration of Academic Merit, Freedom and Integrity on joining the Science Academy. The first elected (2012) foreign honorary members are the physicists Edouard Brezin, Joel Lebowitz and David Pines, the astrophysicist Lord Martin Rees, the chemist Atta-ur Rahman, the philosopher Dagfinn Føllesdal, and political scientists Dame Helen Wallace and Sir Adam Roberts.

To attract young talent to careers in science and scholarship is a fundamental priority. The Science Academy has started a research award program for young scientists and scholars, and in its first year has already made 20 awards for two-year research support based on donations from business and individuals. The support we received at the launch of this program was very encouraging. In the US tax deductible donations to the Science Academy can be made through the [Turkish Philanthropy Funds](#).

The Science Academy has started studies and made declarations on science and education policy, in particular on recent official statements that the theory of evolution is “controversial” vis-a-vis creationism. Our members in social and political sciences and economics have made an analysis of the current political developments in Turkey in the summer of 2013.

The Science Academy is already a member of the International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies, IHRNASS, an international network of academies hosted by the US National Academy of Sciences. We have applied for membership in other international leagues of academies like the European ALLEA, the Inter Academy Panel and the Academy of Sciences of the Developing World (Trieste).

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