

Turkish Academy of Sciences to lose its independence

9 September 2011, by Lin Edwards

(PhysOrg.com) -- Members of TÜBA, the Turkish Academy of Sciences, are threatening to resign en masse in order to fight a decree issued by the government of Turkey that would strip the Academy of its autonomy.

The decree, issued on 27th August, which was just after the start of a nine-day holiday in Turkey, says that one-third of the members of the academy will now be appointed by the [government](#) and a further one-third by the Council of Higher Education, which is also a government body. Only the remaining one-third will be elected by current members. The president and vice-president of the academy will in future be appointed by the government rather than by sitting members. In addition, honorary members will lose their voting rights and the age at which members are deemed honorary will be reduced from 70 to 67.

TÜBA has issued a statement that says the government's decree effectively ends the Academy and replaces it with a new Academy of Sciences that will be under the control of the government. They add: "There is no science academy in the world where the majority of members and the president are appointed directly by the government."

The academy has been given no reasons for the changes, but the government has the right to make changes to the academy's structure because the academy is publicly funded.

Members of the academy are still hoping to convince the government to reverse the decision. They have also notified Turkey's President of their grave concern. There has been talk of a mass walk-out of members, who would then form an independent academy, but such a move would be hampered by a lack of funding.

Current president of TÜBA, Dr. Yücel Kanpolat, was due to be replaced by an elected successor in

December, when his three-year term ends. The decree means his term has been ended prematurely, but he can remain in the position until the government's appointee is named. Kanpolat plans to stay so that the academy is not left without a leader doing this tumultuous period.

The International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies has written to Recep Erdoğan, the Prime Minister of Turkey, expressing its deep distress at the decree and asking the PM to quickly reverse the decision, adding that any "legitimate, respected national academy" must be self-governing.

TÜBA was founded in 1993 and until the decree its members were all elected on academic merit. The current number of members is 140, but the changes will raise the number to 300. Over 40 of the current members are aged over 70, and have honorary member status. The academy has acted as scientific advisor to the government and organized various meetings, award and scholarships for scientists.

More information: www.tuba.gov.tr/en.html

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