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## ***Polish Academy of Sciences and the Excellence of People\****

### **Abstract**

After the political, economical and social turmoil that swept throughout our societies over the last 20 years, the academies of sciences in our region have often faced an identity crisis. Most of them used to play the major role in science policy-making. Then, stripped often of their power, by deprivation of the financial and political instruments, academies have had to redefine their status. However, these difficult times did not deprive the academies of their major asset – quality of the membership. Thus, nowadays this should be our major advantage.

Polish Academy of Sciences is also in the same position. Its membership is set at 350 maximum and the members are divided into 7 divisions. Majority, ca. 2/3 of members come from the universities, and most of the remaining from the Academy institutes. There are 77 research establishments of the Academy, with 65 being formally called institutes, i. e., equipped with the right to award Ph. D. and often D. Sc. (dr hab.) degrees as well as allowed to nominate professorial title (given by the President of the Polish Republic). The remaining research units are smaller and are called departments, centers, etc. Notably, The Academy does not finance its own institutes. Instead they compete for the „statutory funds” (comprising the majority of their funding, and covering mostly the salaries) with all other research institutions, including university faculties.

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\* The paper is printed as submitted.

One of the major tasks of the Academy members is to supervise the Academy research units. However, except for being actively involved in the process of election/selection of the institutes' directors and participation in the research councils of the institutes, the members of the Academy do not play any major role in the Academy research activities (unless they are employed in the institutes). However, this supervising role appears effective as 90% institutes are in the top 25-30% category of all Polish research institutions in each field. Notably, at the end of September a major overhaul of the Polish scientific organization has been revealed by the government, with important modification of the law governing the Academy proposed. According to this project, the active Academy members shall play more direct role in supervising the Academy research activities.

On the other hand, the membership of the Academy does play a decisive role in supervising scientific research in Poland. This is because the Academy members are called for a number of duties in the most important committees evaluating investigator-initiated research and proposing state-sponsored research directions. Just from my own field, biology, Prof. Jerzy Duszynski is the under-secretary of state (vice-minister) supervising science in the Ministry for Science and Higher Education. Prof. Maciej Zylicz is the president of the Foundation for Polish Science (FNP, non-governmental organization being the most prestigious and second, after the state budget, sponsor of science in Poland). Prof. Andrzej Jerzmanowski is a member of FNP Council and Ministry Research Council (this body *de facto* decides about the budget distribution, both for institutions and research grants. Prof. January Weiner is the previous chair of the biology/earth sciences section of the Ministry Research Council, and now the member of Science Policies Committee of the Council. Prof. Szczepan Bilinski is the deputy Rector of the Jagiellonian University and Prof. Jacek Otlewski is the Dean of the Biotechnology of the Wroclaw University. Those are just a few examples of present prominent jobs carried out by our colleagues (from rather small Division of the Biological Sciences) and it has to be underlined and all of them have undertaken those jobs after they became the Academy members!

The aforementioned examples and considerations speak for the excellence of the Academy membership and one shall congratulate excellent jobs and positions taken over by those members. However, the key question is whether those virtues serve promotion of excellent science. Indeed, I believe that this is the case. Over the last dozen years, the highly placed Academy members

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were instrumental in bringing about new quality-oriented evaluation system of research establishments and this has already paid off as demonstrated by increasing values of „scientometric” numbers, such as journal impact factor and citations. In some institutes, e. g., the Nencki Institute, new fully transparent open competition-based hiring policies have been implemented, including recruitment of young group leaders.

Hopefully, all of the above will also result in implementing the new, quality- and excellence-oriented system of evaluating and supporting scientific endeavor in Poland in the coming years.

