A. MICHAILIDIS/DEMOTIX/CORBIS

Student protesters in Thessaloniki object to changes in university governance.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Protests delay Greek university reform

Small groups of agitators stop elections for governing boards.

BY ALISON ABBOTT

As European leaders put the finishing touches to a €130-billion (US$170-billion) rescue package for Greece's enfeebled economy, angry demonstrators are blocking university reforms that many researchers believe are crucial to the country's recovery. The protesters, mostly students but also some academics, are targeting a law passed by the Greek parliament last August that seeks to introduce more meritocracy, dynamism and accountability to Greece's rigid higher-education system. Opponents dislike the law mainly because it takes away students' rights to vote on many faculty decisions, and mandates 15-person governing boards that will have to include six members external to the university (see *Nature* **481,** 123–124; 2012).

On 22 February, demonstrators at the University of Crete in Heraklion and at the Athens University of Economics and Business disrupted elections for the governing boards by blocking the entrances to the buildings in which voting was to take place. Protesters have stopped elections at four other universities in past weeks.

The actions have caused widespread consternation. "It's frustrating," says pharmacologist Achilleas Gravanis of the University of Crete, a member of the government's scientific advisory committee. "If we can't implement a law that had been approved by an overwhelming parliamentary majority, how are we going to convince those in Europe who are bailing us out that we are capable of reform?"

Greek higher-education minister Anna Diamantopoulou says that the protesters are "holding hostage the vast majority of faculty and students". She plans to ask parliament for rapid approval of an electronic voting system to bypass the confrontations before elections at other universities — eight of which are planned for March. Nine universities have not started planning elections because their rectors disapprove of the law.

Like other opponents, Yannis Krestenitis, an oceanographer at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, hopes that the law will be declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, which is deliberating charges that it violates academic independence. "It is clearly undemocratic," he says. Krestenitis helped to lead demonstrations that blocked two attempts to hold elections at the university, on 15 and 17 February.

Many others, however, regard the protests themselves as undemocratic. "What we have been seeing in Thessaloniki runs counter to any rules of a democratic state or decently functioning university," says physicist Orestis Kalogirou, a candidate for the Aristotle University board. According to Georgios Theodoridis, an analytical chemist at the institution, students broke into the polling station and were later joined by more than 150 protesters — including 20 or so faculty members — who formed a human chain to block the main university entrance while chanting slogans. "It feels a bit like George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, where the dogs are constantly barking so others cannot speak to each other," says Theodoridis. ■

INFRASTRUCTURE

Structural biologists share their toys

European network pools resources to unpick the secrets of the cell.

BY EWEN CALLAWAY

To study the components of a cell, from proteins to organelles, scientists need a barrage of high-end equipment that no one laboratory can afford. Researchers typically access the tools they don't have at collaborating labs or national centres. But with the launch of the Instruct network on 23 February, structural biologists across Europe have teamed up to make this sharing more systematic.

Instruct links up 22 structural-biology centres, allowing researchers to access a range of equipment and expertise in a single request, says Instruct's head David Stuart, a structural biologist at the University of Oxford, UK.

It also presents an opportunity for structural biologists to solicit funding with a unified voice — just in time for Horizon 2020, the European Commission's next research-funding programme, which is gearing up to disburse an anticipated €80 billion (US$108 billion) in grants between 2014 and 2020.

Instruct emerged from Europe-wide projects that determined the crystal structures of hundreds of proteins and protein complexes. Stuart says that the project will now try to fill in details of the cell at every scale in a way that he likens to zooming towards a location using Google Earth. "The idea is to have a 'Google Cell' approach, so you can drill from the cellular context to the atomic detail," he says.

For instance, a scientist studying herpes infection might start by looking at fluorescent viruses under a light microscope. Switching to electron microscopy would reveal ▶