Election results delight scientists

Turkish researchers hope that a more pluralistic parliament will put an end to interference and slipping standards.

BY ALISON ABBOTT

Scientists in Turkey are euphoric after a 7 June election that stripped the mildly Islamic and increasingly repressive Justice and Development Party (AKP) of its absolute parliamentary majority. They hope that Turkey’s next parliament will reverse the creeping restrictions on academic freedom and the seeping away of scientific standards that have been a feature of the AKP’s 12 years of political domination. These include stripping public science organizations of their autonomy; allowing the teaching of creationism and astrology; and, most recently, a ban on social scientists interviewing political refugees.

Many of the policies that scientists object to were pushed by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was prime minister between 2003 and 2014 and is now president. Although the AKP remains the largest party in parliament, it now needs a coalition partner to form a government.

“We couldn’t do this in the first science phase; we had to run the most simple system we could,” says Meierhenrich.

The comet is now a very different environment from when Philae landed, with a much stronger outpouring of gas and dust. For Philae, the change of seasons is double-edged: there will be more particles in the atmosphere for the lander to ‘sniff’, says Ulamec, but the particles pose a danger to Rosetta’s navigation systems, and will continue to intensify until August, when the comet will be closest to the Sun. To avoid damage, Rosetta might need to retreat to such a distance that it would no longer be able to communicate with Philae on the surface.

But once the comet rounds the Sun in September, Rosetta could come back in closer and let Philae phone home again.
Ageing pushed as treatable condition

Regulators asked to consider innovative trial design.

BY ERIKA CHECK HAYDEN

Doctors and scientists want drug regulators and research funding agencies to consider medicines that delay ageing-related disease as legitimate drugs. Such treatments have a physiological basis, researchers say, and could extend a person’s healthy years by slowing down the processes that underlie common diseases of ageing — making them worthy of government approval. On 24 June, researchers will meet with regulators from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to make the case for a clinical trial designed to show the validity of the approach.

Current treatments for diseases related to ageing “just exchange one disease for another”, says physician Nir Barzilai of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York. “That is because people treated for one age-related disease often go on to die from another relatively soon thereafter.”

“What we want to show is that if we delay ageing, that’s the best way to delay disease.”

Barzilai and other researchers plan to test that notion in a clinical trial called Targeting Aging with Metformin, or TAME. They want to show is that if we delay ageing, that’s the best way to delay age-related disease — cancer, heart disease or cognitive impairment — or are at risk of them. People with type 2 diabetes cannot be enrolled because metformin is already used to treat that disease. The participants will be monitored to see whether the medication forestalls the illnesses they do not already have, as well as diabetes and death.

On 24 June, researchers will try to convince FDA officials that if the trial succeeds, they will have proved that a drug can delay ageing. That would set a precedent that ageing is a disorder that can be treated with medicines, and perhaps spur progress and funding for ageing research.

During a meeting on 27 May at the US National Institute on Aging (NIA) in Bethesda, Maryland, Robert Temple, deputy director for clinical science at the FDA’s Center for Drug Evaluation and Research, indicated that the agency is open to the idea.

Barzilai and his colleagues eschew claims of a quest for immortality, because they think that such assertions have led to a perception that the field is frivolous and irresponsible. “The perception is that we are all looking for a fountain of youth,” says Stephanie Lederman, executive director of the American Federation for Aging Research in New York. “We want to avoid that; we’re trying to do is increase health span, not look for eternal life.”