

## **COMECE: EU-besluit stap terug in bescherming embryo's**

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The Secretariat of COMECE has followed the preparation of the 7th Framework Research Programme for the period 2007-2013. It expresses its profound dejection regarding the decision of the European Council of Ministers on 24 July 2006.

The Catholic Church recognises the importance of developing an economy based on knowledge, research and innovation in the European Union. To this end the 7th Framework Research Programme is an essential instrument to support research and innovation at the European Union level. The COMECE plenary session in November 2005 acknowledged that : "Science and research make major contributions to the quality of life, especially in the area of health where new therapeutic options are available. They are also an important factor for the economic development."

Like the preceding programme, in its current form the 7th FPR continues to promote research on stem cells from human embryos with the support of the European Parliament. This is the present situation notwithstanding the opposition of certain Member States which were not able to achieve better guarantees for the respect of human dignity in the negotiations at the European Council of Ministers on Monday 24 July. In order to complement the agreement reached in the Council of Ministers, the European Commission added a twelve point declaration which foresees in particular that the 7th FPR will not fund the destruction of human embryos, but will fund research on embryonic stem cells resulting from such destruction.

This declaration is most unsatisfactory because European funding of research on embryonic stem cells entails the risk of promoting at the level of the member states the destruction of human embryos. Therefore the Secretariat of COMECE reiterates its objection to EU funding of research which implies directly or indirectly the destruction of human embryos. In this respect, it recalls the statement of the Executive Committee of COMECE, 31 Mai 2006 : "Treating the human embryo as an object for research is not compatible with human dignity."

The use of human embryos for research purposes, i.e. their destruction or the research with stem cells derived from these embryos is not acceptable. Furthermore there is no necessity to undertake this research; according to experts, adult stem cells and stem cells from the umbilical cord, offer an alternative path with interesting and real perspectives for therapy.

The Secretariat of COMECE is perplexed by the contradiction between this decision which is an attack on human dignity at the beginning of life and the objective of the European Union to promote therapies aiming to save human life. This decision contradicts also the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU which states in Article 1: "Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected."

Therefore we draw the attention of public opinion to the gravity of this decision. We underline once again the fundamental importance of the social-ethical and bioethical dimensions of this debate for Europe and its future. We invite our fellow citizens and especially Catholics to recognize the anthropological significance of this debate regarding human dignity. We call on them to do all in their power to foster such a debate at the level of the European institutions, in the Member States and in civil society. This is vitally important in view of the second reading in the European Parliament in autumn.



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