

COMECE regrets EU Commission's decision on 'One of Us'

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The European Commission decided on 28 May not to submit any legislative proposal as a reply to the European Citizens Initiative 'One of Us'.

This initiative asked for the ending of the EU financing of activities which presuppose the destruction of human embryos, in particular in the areas of research (projects making use of human embryonic stem cells - hESC) and development cooperation (abortion, either directly or indirectly financed).

The One of Us initiative, which gathered the signatures of over 1,7 million European citizens, represented a significant exercise in participatory democracy. COMECE regrets the decision of the EU Commission not to act on its demands. This initiative drew the Commission's attention to a substantive issue: the EU financing of activities which presuppose the destruction of human embryos and on which the initiative pleaded that the Commission should act by banning such funding.

It is COMECE's conviction, grounded on ethical, legal, scientific and even economic arguments, that such funding should not be accepted.

The Communication underpinning the decision of the Commission merely describes the current legal framework and does not advance new arguments to support it. Despite the fact that the citizens' initiative is a new and innovative democratic instrument, one of the key arguments of the Commission for refusing to take any action seems to be the fact that the current legal framework has been recently approved through the democratic process, which can induce the misleading conclusion that there is a conflict between representative democratic instruments and the newer participatory instrument (of which the One of Us initiative is an example). The Commission's decision could lead to a weakening of this specific instrument - the European Citizen's initiative-foreseen by the Lisbon Treaty and designed to bridge the gap between legislators and the citizens they represent.

The Commission's openness to referring again to the European Group on Ethics (EGE) is to be welcomed and may mean that the substantive issue will get a second hearing.

In any case, the European Commission's decision should not discourage Christians and all civil society from continuing to promote the principles underlying this initiative and its policy proposals, in future, at EU level as well as on national level.