

Europese bisschoppen verbijsterd dat EU-parlement instrumenteel gebruik en destructie van embryo's stimuleert

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On 15 June 2006, the European Parliament voted in first reading on the 7th Research Framework Programme and called for EU funding of research with human embryos and human embryonic stem cells. Mgr Noel Treanor, Secretary General of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE), made the following statement:

COMECE is supportive of an effective EU research policy in the service of the common good and objects to the proposal of the European Parliament and the European Commission to provide EU funding for research activities with human embryos and human embryonic stem cells.

As COMECE has previously stated, such research raises fundamental anthropological and ethical problems. Many people are uneasy about research instrumentalising human life and using it as a raw material. This is not just a Catholic position. Scientifically, there is no reason to make a moral distinction between an embryo at the very beginning of his or her life and after implantation in the womb or after 14 days. Human dignity does not depend – and must not be made dependent – on decisions of other human beings. Every human life begins at conception and needs particular protection if it is created outside the woman's body. Human life must never be instrumentalised. We therefore remain opposed in principle to the destruction of any human embryo and the use of human embryonic stem cells.

The European Parliament expressed with a slim majority its support for EU funding of research with human embryonic (and adult) stem cells. As so-called supernumerary human embryos are not mentioned, research implying their destruction could be funded under the 7th Research Programme; only the production of human embryos solely for research purposes is not eligible for EU funding. This, however, should be self-evident as this is against the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine of Oviedo.

The proposal of the Committee for Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) was adopted by 284 votes to 249 with 32 abstentions. The European Parliament itself was divided on the issue, and a significant number of MEPs voted either to exclude funding for all research on human embryos and human embryonic stem cells or at least to tighten the ethical guidelines in order to avoid the further destruction of human embryos. We take also note of the fact that the amendment adopted by the Legal Affairs Committee – which according to the rules of procedure of the European Parliament – is responsible for ethical questions in new technologies – was not respected by the ITRE Committee.

It is a fact that there are divergent views on the anthropological status of the embryo and of the ethical implications of experimentation on human embryos. Yet, since the use and destruction of human embryos is an issue which touches on the inviolability of human life and dignity and thus concerns most deeply held convictions of many EU citizens, the EU has a moral duty to abstain from promoting through joint funding such research prohibited in several member states. Through its funding decision, the EU would interfere with the delicate national decisions made on this matter and would violate the principle of subsidiarity.



Finally, in view of the limited resources available for EU research, and taking into account that not all excellent research projects can be financed because of the lack of money, it is even less understandable that this research is to be promoted by the EU as a community. Should this become the final decision, it would foster distrust towards the EU and its decision making processes.

We therefore urge the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers together with the European Commission to rethink their attitude towards this issue and to concentrate the EU's joint research efforts on truly common research priorities that are less controversial. We take this opportunity to renew our support for the EU to finance research on adult stem cells.