

# Horizon 2020: The EU should not fund research on human embryonic stem cells

*Comece, 21 november 2013*



The success of the recent citizens initiative “One of Us” finally ought to convince the EU Parliament to end the financing of research activities which presuppose the destruction of human embryos. The EU should not ignore the will of nearly 1.9 million EU citizens who signed this initiative.

The European Parliament is about to vote on “Horizon 2020”, the European Union’s new programme for research and innovation running from 2014 to 2020. But the text submitted to the Plenary by the Industry, Research and Energy Committee still envisages the possibility of funding research on human embryonic stem cells (hESC).

## **Ethically and juridically wrong**

The text proposed ignores the ruling in the case of *Greenpeace v. Brüstle*, whereby the European Court of Justice reaffirmed the legal protection of the human embryo, defined as “any human ovum after fertilisation”. Besides, the Legal Affairs Committee – competent to interpret EU law and to examine ethical questions related to new technologies – adopted an Opinion rejecting EU funding of human embryonic stem cells research. This Opinion deserves to be listened to.

## **Scientifically outdated**

A major priority of Horizon 2020 is to raise the standard of excellence in Europe’s scientific research. However, from the scientific point of view, hESC results so far have been rather disappointing, and have failed to fulfil clinical promise. Last year, the Nobel Prize for Medicine was granted for research which opens an alternative to human embryonic stem cells. It seems obvious that the EU should opt to fund research on alternative sources of stem cells, which are more promising and less controversial.

## **Economically inefficient**

The programme aims also at helping innovative organisations to develop technological breakthroughs in order to introduce products with real potential in the market. As the European Court of Justice, in the above mentioned judgement, confirmed that biotechnological inventions using hESC cannot be patented, research on human embryonic stem cells, owing also to this, does not fit into the main objectives of Horizon 2020.

Within the frame of a restricted EU Budget and given that the financial means available for research are limited, EU funding must – in order to spend the available means in the most appropriate manner – concentrate on joint priorities. However, research on human embryonic stem cells is anything but consensual, particularly among EU citizens, as reflected in a recent Eurobarometer.

In the light of the above, the Secretariat of COMECE considers it of paramount importance that no EU funding be provided for research involving the use of hESC also subsequent to their derivation, not least because such funding encourages the procurement of hESC and, as a result, furthers human embryo-destructive research.