



**Commission des Episcopats de la Communauté Européenne
Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community
Kommission der Bischofskonferenzen der Europäischen Gemeinschaft**

EU-Research Funding and Ethics

Brussels, Autumn Plenary, 16-18 November 2005

In the context of the Lisbon Strategy the member states have agreed to significantly increase expenditure for research and development by the year 2010. The EU's institutions are currently in the process of adopting the 7th Research Framework Programme and its complementary specific research programmes.

Support for research

We Bishops of COMECE strongly support the plan to give more support to research and development. 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.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights states in article 1: "Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected." All policy areas of the EU are bound to this, including science and research. The quest for new knowledge should never compromise respect for human dignity. Scientific achievements must furthermore be committed to the common good.

Concern that research may violate human dignity

We therefore express our concern regarding a trend towards conducting research as though the human race were omnipotent. In the life sciences in particular, dynamic developments and discoveries offer new possibilities whilst posing the ever more difficult and important question to society as to whether it is ethical to do all that is technically possible.

We are seriously preoccupied that in several EU member states human embryos are being used and destroyed for the purpose of research, in particular for research with human embryonic stem cells. Although this kind of research may be driven by a sincere wish to contribute to the development of new therapies to alleviate human suffering, we cannot accept the destruction of human life, no matter what the purpose.

The Church maintains the need for humanity to show absolute respect for the inviolability of human life: from the moment of conception, a new human life begins which is not the life of the father or the mother; it is the life of a new human being with its own capacity for growth. This has been confirmed by the findings of modern

science and genetics in particular. This initial stage of human development is an intrinsic and indispensable part of the life of every single human being.

The EU and ethical responsibility

The EU is responsible for distributing EU funds for research projects in the context of the 7th Research Framework Programme. We note the fact that the European Commission proposes to exclude from EU funding research projects that intend to engage in a) “reproductive cloning”, b) modifications of the genetic heritage of human beings which could make such changes hereditary and c) the creation of human embryos solely for the purpose of research, including by means of somatic cell nuclear transfer. However, according to the Commission’s proposal other research projects involving human embryos and human embryonic stem cells are not excluded from EU financing. Given fundamental ethical reservations and given the fact that in several member states this research is prohibited by law, the EU should refrain from providing joint funding for such research projects.

We are seriously concerned that the current decision making procedures applied by the EU and by its institutions do not take sufficient account of the particular importance of certain ethical questions. The question as to whether the EU should provide funding for research on human embryos and embryonic stem cells is an issue that concerns the dignity and inviolability of human life, which is at the very foundation of our societies. According to the present legislative framework of the EU, it is the exclusive competence of the member states to allow or forbid certain kinds of research. The EU must do everything to ensure that it takes due account of the existential dimension of human dignity. In dealing with such ethical questions, majority voting is not adequate. The EU must not interfere, directly or indirectly, with the ethical positions taken by member states in their areas of competence. The EU should also for this reason refrain from funding areas of research involving human embryos and human embryonic stem cells.

Furthermore, in determining the distribution of the scarce financial resources available for research, the EU is confronted with an ethical decision at yet another level: even if the budget is increased significantly, there will always exist many more excellent and worthwhile research projects that cannot be financed due to the shortage of funds. For this reason, the EU should concentrate on common research priorities. In this context it becomes even less understandable why the European Commission would propose making EU funds available for research projects involving human embryos and human embryonic stem cells.

We therefore call on the European institutions to exclude from financing under the future 7th Research Framework Programme research projects involving human embryos and human embryonic stem cells and to concentrate the joint EU efforts in stem cell research on projects where ethical consensus exists. We invite researchers, politicians and citizens to engage with the Churches in a deeper dialogue on scientific and ethical issues, as a service to responsible research and to society and the common good.

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Bishop Adrianus van Luyn (The Netherlands) – Vice-President of COMECE;
Archbishop Hippolyte Simon (France) – Vice-President of COMECE;
Bishop Jozef De Kesel (Belgium);
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Bishop Piotr Jarecki (Poland);
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Bishop Peter Moran (Scotland);
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Bishop Anton Stres (Slovenia);
Bishop Amândio José Tomás (Portugal);
Bishop András Veres (Hungary);
Archbishop Elias Yanes Alvarez (Spain).

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