Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 1352 (2003)[1]

Human stem cell research

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly recalls its previous work on bioethics and, in particular, its Opinions N° 198 (1996) on the draft convention on human rights and biomedicine and N° 202 (1997) on the draft additional protocol to that convention on the prohibition of cloning human beings.

2. It notes that the aim of stem cell research is to add new tools for the development of treatments of several diseases that, up to now, have been incurable or not effectively curable.

3. Human stem cells may be derived from a growing number of tissues and fluids from humans of any age and are not limited to embryonic sources.

4. Any therapeutic use of stem cells that is not derived from the patient has to surmount the barrier of rejection (which might be avoided through cloning techniques).

5. The harvesting of embryonic stem cells for the time being necessitates the destruction of human embryos.

6. Furthermore, the use of xenotechnologies for growing human stem cells – for example feeder cells of animal origin or chimera cloning – increases the risk of transmission of new and dangerous infectious diseases (TSE, HIV, Sars).

7. The Assembly points out that a number of embryonic human stem cell lines suitable for scientific research are already available worldwide.

8. It recalls that Article 18 of the Council of Europe Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine (Oviedo Convention) expressly states that "where the law allows research on embryos in vitro, it shall ensure adequate protection of the embryo". The details of this regulation should be the subject of an additional protocol to be prepared by the Steering Committee on Bioethics (CDBI).

9. The same article expressly prohibits the creation of human embryos for research purposes.

10. The destruction of human beings for research purposes is against the right to life of all humans and against the moral ban on any instrumentalisation of humans.

11. Therefore the Assembly calls on member states:

11.1. to promote stem cell research as long as it respects the life of human beings in all states of their development;

11.2. to encourage scientific techniques that are not socially and ethically divisive in order to advance the use of cell pluripotency and develop new methods in regenerative medicine;

11.3. to sign and ratify the Oviedo Convention to make effective the prohibition of the production of human embryos for research;

11.4. to promote common European basic research programmes in the field of adult stem cells;

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1. Assembly debate on 2 October 2003 (33rd Sitting) (see Doc. 9902report of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education, rapporteur: Mr Wodarg; and Doc. 9942opinion of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mr Høie). Text adopted by the Assembly on 2 October 2003 (33rd Sitting).

11.5. to ensure that, in countries where it is allowed, any research on stem cells involving the destruction of human embryos is duly authorised and monitored by the appropriate national bodies;

11.6. to respect the decision of countries not to take part in international research programmes which are against ethical values enshrined in national legislation and not to expect such countries to contribute either directly or indirectly to such research;

11.7. to give priority to the ethical aspects of research over those of a purely utilitarian and financial nature;

11.8. to promote the establishment of bodies where scientists and representatives from civil society can discuss different kinds of projects on human stem cell research with a view to strengthening transparency and democratic accountability.