Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
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Combating trafficking in human tissues and cells

Motion for a recommendation
tabled by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

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This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

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The Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Human Organs (CETS No. 216) was opened for signature in Santiago de Compostela on 25 May 2015, as a treaty open for signature by the member States, the European Union, the non-member States which enjoy observer status with the Council of Europe, and by other non-member States. So far, unfortunately only 17 States have signed the treaty, and only one country (Albania) has ratified it.

This important Convention deserves our support with a view to increasing the number of signatures and ratifications, and its rapid entry into force.

However, the Convention does not address trafficking in human tissues and cells, a problem whose importance has been rising since the drafting of the Convention. To meet the dramatically increasing demand for human tissues, in particular bone, skin, and heart valves (usually removed from cadavers) – mainly for use in research – trade in human tissues is becoming more and more commercialised, regulations are being bypassed, and criminals are starting to get involved. Human tissues for research are said to be worth more than diamonds, being valued at US$ 500/g.

Similarly, with the increase in fertility treatments, human cells, in particular gametes (both eggs and sperm), are high in demand, leading unscrupulous actors to profit, while egg donors run the risk of ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome, which can be deadly in severe cases.

The Parliamentary Assembly should thus consider whether, in addition to increased support for the Convention against Trafficking in Human Organs, it should recommend that the Committee of Ministers draft an additional Protocol on combating trafficking in human tissues and cells.