



Recommendation 1468 (2000)¹

Biotechnologies

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Biotechnology has experienced huge advances in recent decades following the elucidation of the nature and functioning of the nucleic acids (DNA and RNA) in the 1950s and later work on molecular genetics and the mapping, sequencing and interpretation of entire genomes (human and others). The discovery that DNA molecules are interchangeable among animals, plants, bacteria and other organisms and the possibility to manipulate or change their units (genes) have given biotechnology enormous scope for applications, but have also resulted in serious public concerns about the safety and ethical acceptability of some of the new inventions.

2. This new knowledge imposes choices regarding further developments and applications of biotechnology involving living matter, in particular because of possible consequences for different life forms, the earth's eco-system and humanity. A central reference for choices to be made must be the preservation of human dignity and a healthy environment.

3. It is increasingly important to include ethical considerations centred on humankind, society and the environment in deliberations regarding developments in biotechnologies, life sciences and technologies and their applications.

4. Public opinion should be more strongly involved in political decision-making as regards scientific and technological choices and scientists should be encouraged to engage more in public debate.

5. The parliamentary hearing on scientific information and the European media (Paris, 11-12 October 1999) demonstrated the important role played by the media with regard to information and awareness-raising in the field of biotechnologies.

6. This is why, as regards biotechnologies, their development and applications, especially where human and nature are concerned, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

6.1. ask the relevant steering committees to adopt the precautionary principle as a common tenet of decision-making, once its scope has been clearly defined. The Assembly welcomes in this context the agreement reached on 29 January 2000 in Montreal on an international protocol (the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety) to the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Biological Diversity, regulating trade in genetically modified organisms by including the application of the precautionary principle, but regrets that the decisions made regarding traceability and labelling were not more binding;

6.2. continue to broaden its activities in the field of bioethics, as envisaged in [Recommendation 1213 \(1993\)](#) on developments in biotechnology and the consequences for agriculture. Due account should be taken of the findings of the Council of Europe's international conference on the ethical issues arising from the application of biotechnology (Oviedo, Spain, 16-19 May 1999), covering in particular the problems concerning the patentability of living matter and of [Recommendation 1425 \(1999\)](#) on biotechnology and intellectual property;

1. Assembly debate on 29 June 2000 (23rd Sitting) (see [Doc. 8738](#), report of the Committee on Science and Technology, rapporteur: Mr Mattéi, and [Doc. 8786](#), opinion of the Committee on Agriculture, Rural Development and Food, rapporteur: Mr Wodarg). Text adopted by the Assembly on 29 June 2000 (23rd Sitting).



- 6.3. ask the Steering Committee on Bioethics (CDBI) to prepare, in co-operation with other relevant organisations, for the introduction of an assessment method for ascertaining whether new technologies in medicine and biology are compatible with fundamental ethical principles, human rights and human dignity. This should take into account the decision-making procedures of individual countries and relevant international organisations as well as the different cultural, religious or social traditions or conventions in the member states. Such a method will entail the introduction of a bioethical labelling procedure based, as a minimum, on the shared principles of non-commercialisation of the human body, individual consent and legitimate use for purposes of human health;
- 6.4. convene a group of experts to elaborate, by involving a citizens' forum, the scope and provisions of a future convention on the use of living matter. This would be with the aim of drawing up an international convention on a worldwide basis, under the auspices of organisations which are able to assume the responsibilities that go along with overseeing such a convention;
- 6.5. involve all the partners concerned in co-operation to that end, including the Parliamentary Assembly;
- 6.6. invite the national ethics committees to participate fully in these activities;
- 6.7. call on the member states of the European Union to request the renegotiation of [Directive 98/44/EC](#) of the European Parliament and Council of 6 July 1998 on the legal protection of biotechnological inventions, in particular Article 5, paragraph 2 thereof. The time thus gained, with immediate effect, would permit the necessary public discussion and the finding of an appropriate solution in conformity with the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Dignity of the Human Being with regard to the application of Biology and Medicine: Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine (European Treaty Series No. 164). In this connection, those member governments which have already brought appeals against [Directive 98/44/EC](#) before the Court of Justice of the European Communities should be supported.