

The Permanent Office of the Romanian Patriarchate asks for a re-draft of the ethical provisions of Horizon 2020

In autumn this year, the ITRE Committee (Industry, Research and Energy) of the European Parliament will vote the package of proposals for Horizon 2020, the EU's new multi-annual programme for research and innovation running from 2014 to 2020, with an €87 billion budget. Though it certainly has to be welcomed in light of the expected benefits in terms of economic growth and progress in scientific research, the new project suffers from a series of significant shortcomings regarding the ethical framework on which it is based. In this respect, Horizon 2020 is obviously inferior to the current multi-annual framework programme (2007-2013). More specifically, the stipulations concerning scientific research on human embryonic stem cells (hESC) should certainly be granted a throughout analysis.

Though the new proposal does take over some of the commitments already assumed by the European Commission in its 2006's Statement, they surprisingly enough leave out the one that the Commission "will not submit to the Regulatory Committee proposals for projects which include research activities which destroy human embryos, including for the procurement of stem cells". Within the context of protection of human dignity, and faithful to its faith that life begins in the very moment of conception (fertilization), the Romanian Orthodox Church points out to the fact that destroying human embryos is ethically unacceptable.

Therefore it is highly important for the Horizon 2020 strategy to exclude any possibility to finance research that involves destruction of human embryos by use of hESC in steps subsequent to their derivation. Such funding itself would stimulate the procurement of hESC, and thus escalate human embryo-destructive research, in spite of the growing consensus among researchers in the field that there are better ethical and clinical alternatives. In this regard one should note, *inter alia*, the scientific results recently put forth by the 2012 Nobel Prize laureates for medicine, John B. Gurdon and Shinya Yamanaka, who have confirmed that therapeutic pluripotent cells will soon be made available through alternative processes, avoiding any destruction of human embryos.

Consequently we consider that the present proposals on Horizon 2020 can be improved during the on-going legislative procedure, which determines us to ask all those able to do so to defend a position on this matter which would be consistent with the recent legal and scientific evolutions on hESC research, and yet more so with the fundamental ethical principle put forth above.

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