



Neven Ljubicic: "Croatia is revising its laws on bioethics with the Council of Europe's help"¹

Dubrovnik, 25 April

Dr Neven Ljubicic, Minister of Health and Social Affairs of Croatia, talks about the main topics for the 8th Conference of National Ethics Committees (COMETH), which opens in Dubrovnik on 25 April, and tells us what his country expects from it.

Question: *The Conference of Ethics Committee is meeting in Croatia for the first time: what does the meeting mean to you, and what do you hope from it?*

Neven Ljubicic: Bioethics is a relatively new discipline in Croatia: the medical organisations first started working on it some 15 years ago, and that led to the setting-up of a national bioethics committee.

The Dubrovnik conference shows that Croatia's work in the last few years is recognised and appreciated. The subjects it will be considering are important for us – and for Europe. Our main concerns at the moment are treatment and palliative care for the terminally ill, and the problems raised by medically assisted procreation.

Question: *What help do you expect the COMETH and the Council of Europe to give you on medically assisted procreation?*

Neven Ljubicic: Croatia has ratified the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine, and also its Protocol prohibiting human cloning – both of which lay down principles on assisted procreation. A bill on that question is being hotly debated in Croatia at the moment. Nearly 15,000 children have already been born in our country, using various forms of assisted procreation, but our laws are obsolete and badly need updating. The discussions at the Dubrovnik meeting will help us to prepare new legislation, which must be neither too liberal nor too conservative.

Question: *What aspects of bioethics would you like to see the Council of Europe developing in future?*

Neven Ljubicic: With its wealth of experience and its 46 member states, the Council must remain a forum for co-operation, discussion and the drafting of common standards.

It must continue to promote bioethics by ensuring that its legal instruments, such as the Convention and its Protocols, are genuinely implemented – and must add a recommendation on research on human "biological materials" and a new protocol on human genetics to its arsenal.

It can also encourage the setting-up of new ethics committees on various levels - for example by defining a "model structure" for countries which still have no such committees, either "medical" or more general. Governments and public authorities must also respect the views of national ethics committees. They usually do this in the developed countries - but less so in the others.

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