



Daniel Tarschys: "COMETH helps us to get to grips with the big issues in the biomedical sciences - and will carry on doing that"¹



Dubrovnik, 26 April 2005

Chairman of the Swedish Council on Medical Ethics and former Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Daniel Tarschys has just been elected President of the Council of Europe's Conference of National Ethics Committees (COMETH), whose 8th session is ending today in Dubrovnik (Croatia). In this interview, he sums up and looks ahead.

Question: *What's your verdict on the Dubrovnik conference and, more generally, on COMETH since it was founded?*

Daniel Tarschys: One of COMETH's first jobs was to encourage all the member states to set up national ethics committees. Fifteen years ago, most of the new members had no ethics committees. Now, they nearly all do – we had over 40 committees in Dubrovnik! COMETH gives national committees a chance to discuss issues and problems which concern all of them. Here, we were mainly talking about the ethical implications of an ageing society, pre-implantation genetic diagnosis for immunocompatibility, and the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine - its role and prospects. Our discussions showed that the problems are similar, if not actually identical, everywhere.

Question: *What effect do COMETH's meetings have on the work the Council of Europe does through the CDBI?*

Daniel Tarschys: Some of the CDBI's work has been directly influenced by COMETH - the Protocol on genetics and the work on "human biological materials" are just two examples. Apart from that, COMETH is an assembly of experts, and that makes it possible to pool the input from specialists in different fields. The fact that the CDBI's members are government experts makes that important: when the CDBI and COMETH meet at the same time, it makes contacts and exchange between the different groups easier.

Question: *What about COMETH's future?*

Daniel Tarschys: The Council of Europe has the immense advantage of covering all the countries of Europe, and COMETH is a reflection of that. Moreover, a lot of the Council's ideas on bioethics have been taken up by other institutions. The European Union also has a "Forum" of its member states' ethics committees, and I'd like to see more co-ordination with COMETH. I think COMETH has already proved its usefulness - and has a big future. It is already tackling all the major issues in the biomedical sciences, and will carry on doing that.

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