



Dubrovnik (Croatia), 25-26 April 2005

## 8th Conference of National Ethics Committees (COMETH): “Meeting the challenges of changing societies”

### **CONFERENCE DECLARATION approved by the Bureau of COMETH**

Approximately 100 participants from 42 countries took part in the 8th European Conference of National Ethics Committees (COMETH) held in Dubrovnik, Croatia on 25 and 26 April 2005. The main themes of the Conference were Ethical implications of an ageing society and the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine. Opinions of national ethics committees on preimplantation genetic diagnosis for HLA compatibility, surrogacy, prenatal screening for cystic fibrosis, assisted reproduction, and disputed memories were presented and discussed, as well as a survey on informed consent in genetic research. During the Conference, the following points were made:

#### **The Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine**

- The Convention is a “cornerstone” of a developing « European biomedical law ».
- National ethics committees may play an important role in realizing the principles of the Convention and its Protocols, especially in stimulating public debate. This role is complementary to that played by the governments, legislative bodies and other institutions.
- An important aspect of this development is rooted in cooperation with the instances of the European Union and, in this context, it is satisfying to note that the Convention is acknowledged as an inspiration for the European Charter on Fundamental Rights.

#### **National ethics committee opinions**

- In the case of PGD, the Conference, benefiting from discussions at the national level and the opinions of a number of national ethics committees, contributed to this debate in a Pan European context.

#### **Ethical implications of an ageing society**

- The increase in the lifespan of European populations is a positive development however, it is also a development that brings with it many ethical challenges in particular in regard to biology and medicine. This requires a societal debate that could be animated by national ethics committees.

- Research on therapies or medical products that are to be used by older persons should be encouraged, while including them in appropriate research on such therapies or medical products.
- A number of countries in Europe are exploring or applying appropriate ways for taking into account previously expressed wishes in regard to medical treatment.

### **Functioning of National Ethics Committees today**

- Bilateral cooperation between national ethics committees enables them to enrich their activities and develops the impact of their reflection at international level.
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