

# Conference of European Churches

## Minutes from the TRG on Bioethics meeting

March 14-15, 2015

Strasbourg

Participated: Rev Dr Jean Boboc (Romanian Orthodox Church), Dr Andrea Dörries (Evangelical Church in Germany); Bishop Makarios of Christopolis (Ecumenical Patriarchate); Dr Murdo McDonald (Church of Scotland); Dr Ulrik Becker Nissen (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark); Mr Meego Remmel (Estonian Council of Churches); Ms Julija Vidovic (Serbian Orthodox Church)

Were unable to attend: Rev Dr Brendan McCarthy (Church of England); Rev Dr Miriam Prasilova (Silesian Evangelical Church A.C. in the Czech Republic); Prof Luca Savarino (Waldensian Church in Italy);

1. Welcome and opening prayers
2. Adoption of the Minutes of the last meeting

Change the Minutes p.2 n°5 on Romania

3. Feedback from the Governing Board of CEC

The TRG should pay attention to the reports from Member Churches.

Evangelical Medical Institute (Andrea) has made a compilation of official church statements in Germany: [www.ev-medizinethik.de](http://www.ev-medizinethik.de) ->Themen

**CEC should send a letter to member churches to ask for official statements on reproductive technology: Synod, leading body of the Church; in national language and if there is an English translation, it should be attached.**

4. What is going on in our constituencies (part of Europe, churches, country, international institutions we are related to...)

Germany: Euthanasia is forbidden. Recently a law on assisted suicide was passed (Doctors are responsible for the decision); it is forbidden but under extraordinary circumstances it is permitted. There needs to be a special close relationship between the doctor and the patient. In this case, a doctor may provide a drug to a patient who then commits suicide. But, the Chamber of Physicians says that assisted suicide is forbidden.

Palliative care law was passed, underlining the need to increase palliative care

Guidelines on transplantation, living donation will be issued soon.

Bioethics Council is working on global health care, underlining the need for justice; 2 networks are working with paediatric ethics, set up by young philosophers (children's will).

UK: Wales: Presumed consent in organ donations (unless explicitly said they do not want to give organs for transplantation) =>to increase number of organs available. Scotland is waiting to see what happens in Wales. Churches of Scotland are opposed to the change of the law.

Abortion is no longer under UK law (no new law in Scotland yet, but lobbies are pushing to reduce the time limit for abortion to 22-20 weeks).

Gene Editing of embryos which would not be implanted has been permitted to a research institute of London for research around infertility by Human Fertilisation Authority up to 14 days.

Denmark: Prenatal diagnosis is offered to all pregnant women and almost all accept it. Thus, number of children with Down syndrome decreased dramatically. At the same time it is a worrying tendency since it recalls a situation of eugenics, at least implicit, according to some ethicists. In November, there was a national documentary on TV called “dead over Down’s” that raised a debate on PND (Prenatal Diagnosis) on the ethics of this procedure.

New guidelines to be implemented in 2016 to improve and stress the informed choice of the woman: diagnosis and risk assessment child/abortion. The first guidelines had a more economic rationale but could be argued some trend for eugenics.

CRISPR (Genome Editing) technology is emerging

Use of psychiatric diagnosis: how can it help a person but also how can it stigmatise a person.

(UK: Debate on the baby prenatal diagnosis and baby incompatible with life, they would recommend to go as far in pregnancy as possible to get viable organs.)

Estonia: 1 law and 2 initiatives

Law on the registration of the civil partnerships (same sex or not) in force as of the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2016 was passed but divorces (separations) are not possible. Adoption is not possible either. It is an absurd situation.

Two initiatives that are circulating between Ministries and Bioethical Commission: - Change of gender: only possible with consultation/agreement of a specialist: it is only up to you to decide on who you feel inside for adults;

(Germany: In a situation where the gender of a child is not clear from the beginning, parents can leave the gender open for the new-borns. Apparently this situation is not so difficult as it was thought. It helps to avoid operations at first years of life. )

There are 90% of people who want to change gender without changing anything physically. But it should not be so simple.

-Tele-medication, digitalised database: on the phone, on Skype; privacy problems. Debate around confidentiality; question of data protection. Problem that genetic data are never anonymous.

Serbia: Big debate on surrogacy motherhood, waiting for a possible reaction of the Church.

Abortion restricted by law but often not respected in practice

New state national commission on Bioethical issues

Work develops in parishes on awareness raising on bioethical issues (with a physician and a priest together)

Book : “Repères chrétiens en bioéthique”

France: Law on end of life for people suffering too much, final sedation without reversibility.

Step for getting euthanasia. 90% of French people agree with the idea. Only 2 Roman Catholic bishops argued against the law

Discussions on Down syndrome: 96% of families agree “under the pressure” to get rid of the embryo/child.

Romania: Due to European influence, they are ready to pass a law on the same sex marriages. More than 2 million signatures were collected against it. There will be a street demonstration in Romania and Moldova on this issue on the 27th of March, in favour of the traditional family.

The problem at the origin of everything is the status of embryo. “As long as we do not have an agreement on the status of the embryo, all discussion about bioethics is vain”, said Jean Boboc.

5. Consultation on the Guide to the Ethics of Reproductive Medicine from the Council of CPCE (Community of Protestant Churches in Europe) on 16–18 March 2016 in Loccum, Germany:

4 members of the TRG plus Richard are taking part in it.

6. Working with the European political and legal bodies

Council of Europe Committee for Bioethics (DH-BIO): currently working on (or will start working on):

- Gene Editing
- Predictivity, genetic testing and insurance
- Research on biological materials of human origin
- Protection of the human rights and dignity of persons with mental disorders with regard to involuntary placement and involuntary treatment
- Emerging technologies
- Surrogacy
- Transgender and intersex children
- Gender aesthetic surgery

**=>Send documents of the DH-BIO to the TRG Bio members. They have been made aware of the confidentiality clause and promised to keep the documents confidential as long as requested.**

Members of the TRG may also be participating at the DH-BIO meetings. **The next one is on Tuesday 31 May – Friday 3 June**

European Group of Ethics and Science of the European Commission:

Their latest opinions will be sent with these Minutes (Opinion N° 29 on Ethics of new Health Technologies and Citizens Participation - 2015; Statement on Gene Editing - 2016)

7. Working on our projects, starting with Reproductive technologies and Beginning of life issues (focus till the end of 2017). The expected outcome is 1) a series of short reports or statements; 2) a possibility of a larger conference in 2017 or 2018 (and possible larger publication). Some presentations will be moved to a further meeting.

Contribution from Andrea on Reproductive technologies: present and future medical possibilities (**she agreed to circulate her full paper to all**):

What are we talking about, in respect of clinical use?

- Medical diagnosis (childlessness, infertility): sperm donation by husband/partner into the woman; Egg donation (less done); embryo donation (fertilised egg); surrogate mother (3 persons concerned); uterus transplantation (experimental, 1<sup>st</sup> in Ankara, 2<sup>nd</sup> in Göteborg, 2 derogations in Paris and South of France)
- Medical diagnosis of genetic disease (not possible without IVF): preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PID, PGD); Mitochondrial replacement; (Gene editing\*)
- Social diagnosis (family planning, career): social freezing; IVF/surrogacy; (IVF/gene editing\*); (IVF/reproductive cloning\*)

\*= no use in clinical practice so far

Ulrik's presentation on The significance of the biological bond (**he also agreed to circulate his paper to all**)

The end of his paper reads:

- “Whose bodies are we?
- Who are we? Whose are we?
- Are we determined by our biology?
- Or by the responsive and communal relations we live in?
- Whose are we? Can ART (Assisted Reproductive Technologies) influence our understanding of our lives lead(?) in relation to God as our Lord?”

Murdo presented orally elements from his power point on the legislation of different countries on reproductive technologies.

Short summary:

- ART is a market! It is about looking for market opportunities for commercial entities
- But there is a big difference between procreation and reproduction
- ART presents at the same time an opportunity for couples incapable to have a baby. Pastoral and ethical questions are raised here.

Proposal on a strategy how to proceed practically until 2018:

- 2 reports finalised in the fall 2016
- 1 report finalised in the spring 2017
- 1 report finalised in the fall of 2017
- The proposal for the possibility of a larger conference will be decided on at the November 2016 meeting

Question of the audience for the reports: for a large audience with accurate but understandable facts and arguments.

Topics: **1 = Surrogacy** (UK is one of the more restrictive on this matter), should not be treated without talking about IVF; **IVF; 2 = gene editing**

- Murdo will send his paper on **Gene Editing**
- Bishop Makarios will translate the paper of the Synod on **IVF and Surrogacy Motherhood** and will send it to the group in April.

It has been decided to form two smaller working groups, which will draft reports to present to the next meeting of the whole group in November. The current membership of these groups is:

**Gene Editing:** Murdo, Meego, Julija

**IVF and surrogacy:** Bishop Makarios, Jean, Andrea (to be asked), Ulrik

These groups should confer among themselves, and should plan to circulate a draft report (approximately 15 pages or 10,000 words) to the whole group at least 2-3 weeks before the November meeting, one month prior to the meeting ideally.

Moderator of the Gene Editing group: Murdo

Moderator of the IVF/Surrogacy group: Bishop Makarios

8. Dates of our next meetings

Next meeting in Autumn: **7-8 November 2016**

Next meeting in Spring: **13-14 March 2017**

9. Miscellaneous

10. Closing Prayer before departure

## **Appendix 1**

### **Conference of European Churches**

#### **Thematic Reference Group on Bioethics**

Strasbourg, Monday 14 – Tuesday 15 March 2016

#### **Draft Agenda**

***Working times: Monday 14h-18h30 - Tuesday 09h-12h***

1. Welcome and opening prayers
2. Adoption of the Minutes of the last meeting
3. Feedback from the Governing Board of CEC
4. What is going on in our constituencies (part of Europe, churches, country, international institutions we are related to...)
5. Consultation on the Guide to the Ethics of Reproductive Medicine from the Council of CPCE (Community of Protestant Churches in Europe) on 16–18 March 2016 in Loccum, Germany
6. Working with the European political and legal bodies
7. Working on our projects, starting with Reproductive technologies and Beginning of life issues (focus till the end of 2017). The expected outcome is 1) a series of short reports or statements; 2) a possibility of a larger conference in 2017 or 2018 (and possible larger publication).
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10. Closing Prayer before departure