



Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri

NATIONAL BIOETHICS COMMITTEE

OPINION ON THE DRAFT RESOLUTION ON ASSISTANCE FOR THE TERMINALLY ILL

(30th April 1991)

abstract

The opinion is given on the text approved by the European Parliament Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety of 30 April 1991 'Report of the Committee for the protection of the environment, public health and consumer protection on assistance to the terminally ill'.

The NBC expresses its concern, since it considers that the text approved by the Committee contains heterogeneous issues that are not analysed in depth and that it deals with the question of active euthanasia superficially and incidentally without adequate reasoning. It considers moreover that the definition of death which seems to refer to cortical death and not to total cerebral death is inadequate and ambiguous. Finally, it does not agree with the proposal in the part in which it says that the doctor 'must' satisfy the patient's requests relative to their end of life in a binding way.

The Committee however appreciates the fact that the problem of assistance to the terminally ill is brought to the attention of the European Community, as it requires a high standard of overall care (which cannot be limited to closed facilities) and the involvement of relatives and volunteer associations. The importance is stressed of the use of palliative care and the clinical principle of the proportionality of treatment, which obliges the doctor to abstain from persistent therapy, as well as the importance of fitting professional training for the medical staff.

The NBC recommends that the debate on euthanasia be carried out explicitly, respectful of everyone's opinion and paying careful attention to its ethical, deontological and juridical aspects.

The opinion is followed by the papers and documents used by the Committee of the European Parliament for the drafting of the "Report on the assistance to the terminally ill". Furthermore, working documents presented by some NBC members are attached concerning the above mentioned 'Report' and the annex 'Draft resolution'.