

## Vatican Criticizes Decision on Embryo Work

ROME, DEC. 4, 2006 (Zenit.org).- The European Parliament's approval of funding for research on human embryos reflects a situation of inequality in how individual countries recognize fundamental rights, warns a Vatican official.

Last Thursday the European Parliament adopted the 7th Framework Research Program, allocating €54.5 million (\$72.7 million) for 2007-2013 to sectors ranging from the economy to new technologies, and from the environment to health.

The program, whose funding is 40% higher than the previous project, becomes effective Jan. 1.

The Parliament's press office specified that the financing of projects with embryonic stem cells is allowed so long as the research is authorized by the legislation of the country concerned.

However, the Framework Research Program will not finance research oriented to human cloning for reproductive ends, to modifying the genetic heritage of human beings, or to creating human embryos solely for research ends or to obtain stem cells, the press office added.

Research on the use of human stem cells -- both of adults as well as embryos, depending both on the content of the scientific proposal as well as the juridical framework of the corresponding member states -- can be financed, continues the EP press office.

The obtaining of embryonic stem cells from "spare" embryos -- resulting from in vitro fertilization -- is allowed in Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Spain and the Low Countries, it confirmed.

Estonia, Hungary, Latvia and Slovenia, have no specific regulation on embryonic stem cells, but allow some research with "spare" embryos. Italy and Germany have restrictions and cannot obtain new embryonic stem cells, though they can import them.

Austria, Lithuania and Poland prohibit research with embryonic stem cells. Belgium, the United Kingdom and Sweden allow therapeutic cloning, expressly excluded from the Community's program, the Europarlament press office noted.

### Relativism

This pronouncement of the Europarlament "makes evident the moral and ethical relativism that now governs Europe," lamented Bishop Elio Sgreccia, president of the Pontifical Academy for Life.

"I think that the essence of the deliberation is that everything should be made licit -- except reproductive cloning -- with the sole limitation of national legislation," which shows that "in Europe, fundamental rights are not equal," the bishop warned on Vatican Radio.

"Where there is one kind of law, one is recognized as a human person from conception; where there is another, instead, it is no longer the same," he lamented. "So I no longer see that Europe which was born from a charter of man's rights.

"What is there which is the same for all citizens circulating there? Perhaps the image on a coin or a few individual rights -- but not fundamental rights."

Insofar as this might favor a "black market" in this type of research, Bishop Sgreccia stressed that the European Parliament's pronouncement favors the desire for experimentation and business, "because it is known that one cannot, for example in Italy, extract embryonic cells, but cell lines can be purchased in England."

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