

COMECE Reflections on Science and Bioethics

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How can we deal with patients in state of post-coma unresponsiveness? What are the prospects for human enhancement by technological means? How can we fight organ trafficking and transplant tourism? What exactly are sexual and reproductive health rights? These are very technical yet nevertheless crucial topics with which EU lawmakers are more and more confronted. In order to offer an insight into the ethical implications of these issues the COMECE Secretariat has now published volume 2 of 'Science & Ethics'. The Opinions developed by its Bioethics Reflection Group provide an analysis of these concepts and situations and offer reflections and recommendations directed towards EU decision-makers.

The principal and most recent Report and Opinion in the collection deals with the term 'sexual and reproductive health' which is deeply ambiguous since it appears to include abortion as a 'right', in contradiction with a strict interpretation of international law and European legislation. The repeated use of the term – in declarations, resolutions, recommendations– tends to bring the phrase into common use and contributes, through customary law, to the establishment of a 'right', despite the reservations made by many countries, the primary actors in international law, and despite the fact that it is not mentioned in any convention or universal international treaty. The COMECE Opinion therefore offers a clarification of this concept as well as some recommendations to EU decision-makers.

The publication contains three other Opinions on 'the state of post-coma unresponsiveness', 'human enhancement' and the 'non-commercialisation of parts of the human body'. The publication is available in English and French.

The COMECE Secretariat monitors and analyses current EU policy and legislation concerning, inter alia, research, health and other matters with relevance to the field of bioethics. To this end, the Secretariat of COMECE has maintained since 1996 a Reflection Group on Bioethics comprising 15 Bioethics experts representing some of the Catholic Bishops' Conferences. Such experts provide a rich exchange of views facilitated by their multi-disciplinary backgrounds including theological, philosophical, legal, medical and other scientific disciplines. Members meet twice a year to discuss the impact of scientific advances and biotechnological innovations for mankind. This is done normally with contributions from invited external experts, either from the EU institutions or other entities.

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