

The European Parliament debate on human genetics
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Abstract

The presentation will outline recent and current activities related to the debate within the European Parliament concerning the key issues (ethical, social, legal and economic) stemming from new developments in the field of human genetics. Prominent among them are the activities connected with the Temporary Committee on Human Genetics that was set up by the Parliament in December 2000 for a period of twelve months in order to examine these issues, make recommendations on the possible need for a proactive response and provide orientation for Parliament and the other Community institutions with regard to related research.

An overview will be given of the activities of the temporary committee, including expert hearings, delegation visits and drafting of the committee's report, which was rejected by the plenary in the final vote (November 2001). Special attention will be paid to the contribution of STOA to the work of the committee, including studies carried out prior to and after the commencement of its work, compilation and analysis of replies to a questionnaire sent to scientific experts, and the secondment of a STOA staff member to the committee secretariat.

Ethics occupied a prominent part in the debate within and between the European institutions that led up to the adoption, in 2002, of the 6th Community Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP6). The key issues addressed in this debate will be described, especially the ethical aspects of research involving the use of human embryos and human embryonic stem cells. The adoption of FP6 was accompanied by a temporary moratorium on Community funding of such research and a commitment for the adoption in the meantime of guidelines to govern future decisions in this area. The Commission proposal amending the related specific programme is being currently examined by the Parliament (consultation procedure) in view of a Council decision expected by the end of the year.