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Genetically engineered human beings

Motion for a recommendation

tabled by Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

The scientific community has raised grave concerns about the potential use of newly discovered, more accessible gene-editing techniques to gametes and embryos. These techniques make it easier to insert, remove, and edit genes, but the consequences on the children born, the human genome and future generations are not yet known.

The use of the new techniques has the potential to cure genetically transmitted diseases, but could also add unintended traits, or be abused to genetically engineer human beings. This is why it is urgent for the technique's ethical and safety implications to be studied. The Parliamentary Assembly first raised awareness on the issue in Recommendations 934 (1982) on "Genetic engineering" and 1512 (2001) on "Protection of the human genome by the Council of Europe". Article 13 on "Interventions on the human genome" of the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine (CETS No.: 164), provides that: "An intervention seeking to modify the human genome may only be undertaken for preventive, diagnostic or therapeutic purposes and only if its aim is not to introduce any modification in the genome of any descendants". However, this Convention has not yet been ratified by all Council of Europe member States, and even those which have may interpret the limits of this provision differently.

The Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development held a hearing on the subject during the October 2015 part-session. The Assembly should study the health, ethical and human rights risks and challenges related to the techniques' use and regulation with a view to making the appropriate recommendations to the Committee of Ministers on possible action to be taken to provide a common framework for the use of these technologies.

