

State of Euthanasia Assisted Suicide in Europe

Presented at DRLIB April 25, 2014

- EPC Europe
- Common themes
- Switzerland
- Netherlands
- Belgium
- Luxembourg
- United Kingdom
- France

Euthanasia Prevention Coalition Europe

- Kevin Fitzpatrick – unable to make it today
- EPC Europe <http://www.epce.eu/>
- Recently formed
- Aims :
 1. We oppose the legalisation of euthanasia and assisted suicide and will work to repeal existing laws allowing it.
 2. We promote the best care and support for vulnerable people who are sick, elderly, mentally ill or disabled.
 3. We affirm life through helping people to find meaning, purpose and hope in the face of suffering and despair.

Common themes

- Existing legislation touted as success – proposed as example. E.g. Bill 52 in Quebec modelled closely on Belgian law.
- Increase in suggestion that euthanasia is a form of healthcare.
- Changing vocabulary and use of euphemisms: From “euthanasia” to “dying with dignity” to “medical aid in dying”. Vocabulary impacts public (and legislator) perception. Muddies the water.
- Once introduced, euthanasia law runs out of control. Incremental extension: “First euthanasia was dreadful, second was much easier, and third was a ‘piece of cake’”¹.
- Euthanasia law is the same as assisted suicide law. Difference between placing drug directly in the patient’s mouth or placing them in the patient’s hand.
- People with disabilities are the most vulnerable group.
- No possible safeguards

Switzerland

- Assisted suicide is not punishable, unless a selfish motive can be proven (e.g. inheritance) – Article 115 Penal Code of Switzerland 1942
- Canton of Vaud requires hospitals and nursing homes to facilitate assisted suicide since 2012²
- 700% rise in assisted suicide for Swiss nationals (43 in 1998 – 297 in 2009)³.
- 550-600 non-Swiss nationals “assisted” to die in Switzerland every year (Dignitas: 198 in 2012 alone)⁴
- University hospital of Geneva reduced already small palliative care team after deciding to allow assisted suicide⁵
- Elderly woman in the UK “fed up with modern life” went to Switzerland to be killed⁶

Netherlands

- Euthanasia legalised in 2001
 - Patient must have unbearable suffering with no prospect of improvement
- Groningen Protocol⁷ - allows euthanasia of “severely ill” infants
- 14% of deaths in the Netherlands at the hands of their doctors (euthanasia + terminal sedation)⁸
- At least 1,700 cases of “terminal sedation” wrongly applied⁹.
- Mobile euthanasia teams¹⁰ in use for people with depression, disabilities, Alzheimer’s, or just plain loneliness¹¹.
- Some abuse cases
 - “Tired of life” - 42 psychiatric patients euthanized in 2013
 - Mother of 2 children euthanized because of chronic tinnitus in March 2014¹².
 - Elderly lady euthanized because she was going blind and could not stand to see dirt¹³.

Belgium

- Euthanasia legalised in 2002
 - Patients must be in a medically hopeless situation due to a serious and incurable condition caused by injury or illness, with physical and/or psychological suffering which is constant and unbearable, and cannot be mitigated.
- Legalisation of euthanasia for children of any age in 2014
- Five-fold increase of euthanasia between 2003 (235) and 2012 (1432)¹⁴
- 23% of lung transplants come from donors who died by euthanasia¹⁵.
- Intensive Care Physicians believe shortening life is not only acceptable, but desirable¹⁶.
- Some abuse cases
 - Many euthanasia not reported (47% in Flandres)¹⁷.
 - 22% of euthanasia carried out by nurses (which is illegal)¹⁸.
 - Deaf twins euthanized because they were going blind¹⁹.
 - Transsexual euthanized because of botched sex-change surgery²⁰.

- Woman euthanized because she was depressed. Family not notified²¹.
- Woman euthanized because she had anorexia²².
- One prisoner euthanized²³, triggering requests from other prisoners not terminally ill²⁴.

Luxembourg

- Legal since 2009
 - For those in a severe and incurable terminal medical situation with constant and unbearable physical or mental suffering without prospects of improvement.
- 19 deaths in first 3 ½ years
- Small population (500,000)

United Kingdom

- Illegal but discretion granted prosecutors on a case-by-case basis.
- Failed attempts to legislate in 2006, 2009 and 2010.
- New bills in front of Parliament.
 - For “mentally competent adults with less than six months to live and a 'clear and settled intention to end their lives'”.
 - Second reading (debate) expected in Spring 2014.
 - “Paper thin” safeguards “not fit for purpose”²⁵.
 - GP safe from prosecution as long as they “genuinely believe it was the patient’s wish”²⁶.

France

- In 2012, the Comité consultatif d'éthique (a French law and ethics Commission) recommends against legalising euthanasia or assisted suicide²⁷ and suggests “terminal sedation” should be the French answer to euthanasia²⁸.
- Repeated promises of French President to legalise euthanasia in France²⁹ despite the recommendations of the ethics Committee.
- Apparent popular support (92% in 2013, down from 94% in 2010), but only 15% understand the proposed legislation³⁰.

¹ http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200506/ldhansrd/vo060512/text/60512-29.htm#60512-29_spnew2

² http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/swiss_news/Vaud_to_get_first_Swiss_assisted_suicide_law.html?cid=32920490

³ <http://www.lifenews.com/2012/03/29/switzerland-assisted-suicide-deaths-up-700-in-11-years/>

⁴ <http://www.epce.eu/en/countries/switzerland/>

⁵ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3070710/>

⁶ <http://www.theblaze.com/stories/2014/04/07/elderly-woman-apparently-just-fed-up-with-modern-life-granted-an-assisted-suicide-in-switzerland/>

⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Groningen_Protocol

⁸ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2448611/Blind-Dutch-woman-euthanised-loss-sight.html>

⁹ <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/5270/Zorg/article/detail/3523096/2013/10/08/Artsen-en-verpleegkundigen-schieten-tekort-bij-stervensbegeleiding.dhtml>

-
- ¹⁰ <http://www.alexschadenberg.blogspot.ca/2012/03/mobile-euthanasia-units-started-in.html>
- ¹¹ <http://alexschadenberg.blogspot.ca/2011/09/dutch-physicians-association-approves.html>
- ¹² <http://www.omroepwest.nl/nieuws/15-04-2014/gaby-olthuis-47-uit-nootdorp-kreeg-euthanasie-vanwege-oorsuizen>
- ¹³ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2448611/Blind-Dutch-woman-euthanised-loss-sight.html>
- ¹⁴ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25364745>
- ¹⁵ http://www.applied-cardiopulmonary-pathophysiology.com/fileadmin/downloads/acp-2011-1_20110329/05_vanraemdonck.pdf
- ¹⁶ <http://www.jccjournal.org/article/S0883-9441%2813%2900320-1/fulltext>
- ¹⁷ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2950259/>
- ¹⁸ <http://www.cmaj.ca/content/182/9/905.full>
- ¹⁹ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2261985/Belgian-twin-brothers-killed-doctors-choosing-euthanasia-able-again.html>
- ²⁰ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2440086/Belgian-transsexual-Nathan-Verhelst-44-elects-die-euthanasia-botched-sex-change-operation.html>
- ²¹ http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/how_my_mother_died
- ²² http://www.bioedge.org/index.php/bioethics/bioethics_article/10388
- ²³ <http://www.estrepublicain.fr/fil-info/2012/09/13/premiere-euthanasie-d-un-prisonnier-en-belgique>
- ²⁴ <http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2013/10/30/01003-20131030ARTFIG00261-ces-detenus-belges-qui-preferent-la-mort-a-la-prison.php>
- ²⁵ <http://www.carenokilling.org.uk/news/key-analysts-blast-falconer-bill/>
- ²⁶ <http://www.epce.eu/en/falconer-uk-doctors-above-the-law/>
- ²⁷ <http://www.20minutes.fr/ledirect/1182477/20130701-comite-ethique-contre-legalisation-euthanasie>
- ²⁸ <http://www.ethox.org.uk/ethox-blog/a-glance-at-france-the-french-exception-and-the-end-of-life>
- ²⁹ <http://www.20minutes.fr/societe/1273874-20140114-francois-hollande-annonce-encore-fois-loi-leuthanasie>
- ³⁰ <http://www.20minutes.fr/societe/1244445-20131031-fin-vie-92-francais-favorables-a-loi-permettant-leuthanasie>