



Dear Praying Friends in Europe,

"Teach us to remember that we must die, that we may be wise." (Psalm 90:12)

Dying and death are no longer suppressed in Europe. "Dying with dignity" and a self-determined death are openly discussed. In modern Europe, however, with its states characterised by individualism and diverse world views, there are no common convictions about "dying well" that are shared by all. This leads to uncertainty among doctors, nursing staff and relatives about how to deal with patients' dying wishes. Is a doctor allowed to assist suicide at the request of a patient out of compassion? For example, how to deal with situations in which self-control is increasingly lost (e.g. severe dementia)? Legal regulations in Europe currently diverge widely in answering such questions.

Assisted suicide in European law

The comments about legal regulations on assisted suicide reflect the different convictions within European countries. Some speak of human self-determination, which includes the freedom to dispose of one's own life. Others see the socially anchored protection of life at risk and emphasise the importance of a ban on killing for human coexistence. Some European countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg created a legal framework decades ago, whereby assisted suicide or killing on request are exempt from punishment after examination by a commission.

In Spain (2020) and Portugal (2021), parliaments have also recently passed laws legalising assisted suicide and killing on demand.

In other countries such as Germany, France, the UK and Switzerland, an intense debate on assisted suicide is currently taking place, given the differences mentioned above. This public debate is often characterised by extreme individual cases of seriously ill people, which lead to different reactions in the media, politics and the medical profession. This overlooks the fact that the legalisation and regulation of organised assisted suicide has fundamental effects on societies' attitudes towards dying and death.

Personal suffering

Suffering is difficult to understand unless one experiences it oneself. The situations that can lead a person to demand death are complex. Often different causes are intertwined. Physical suffering such as pain or shortness of breath can be exacerbated by feelings of helplessness, fear and increasing dependence on others. "The body is no longer a place of life, but of suffering".

A terminal illness confronts people with their own mortality, but the time of death is unknown. This can lead them to want to regain control by determining the time and circumstances of their own death.

Some find their suffering unbearable and express a desire to die. However, experience with legalised euthanasia in the Netherlands and Belgium shows that by no means all those who have applied for euthanasia actually follow this path to the end. Research shows that by listening to and accepting the person, foundations are laid for jointly seeking ways to improve the situation (e.g. appropriate medication, psychosocial care). Those who express a wish for euthanasia do not always express a preference for death over life.

Euthanasia in Belgium

Since 2002, active euthanasia has been permitted in Belgium under certain conditions. The aim was to enable the self-determination of the terminally ill and to decriminalise it. Studies from Belgium show that it is quite rare for sick people to request euthanasia because of severe physical suffering. It is often related psychological suffering combined with loneliness. People who are in a similar physical condition, but are well cared for, do not think about euthanasia. So, it all depends on how doctors, nurses and relatives deal with the psychological suffering of the seriously ill.

There is a danger that requests for euthanasia will increasingly be prompted by a sense of loneliness and uselessness. The legitimate concern is that "in the name of the total autonomy of the person, the bond of solidarity in society is deteriorating."

Prof. Timothy Devos, palliative care physician at the University Hospital of Leuven (Belgium), therefore demands: "We can still improve the treatment and care of patients at the end of life, we have to set higher goals!"

Prayer points

- Pray that the attempts to legalise euthanasia and killing on request in other European countries (e.g. France, Germany, Great Britain) will fail.
- Pray that the voices will be heard that point out that this legalisation has harmful consequences for the coexistence of the whole society.
- Pray for strengthening and greater financial support for palliative care in European countries.

Polish Election Results

In the elections in Poland a few weeks ago, the ruling Law & Justice party PiS (in power since 2015) lost ground and gained only 35.4% of the vote. The three opposition parties together had 53.7% and are set to form a coalition government.

Polish Christians are on both sides of the debate.

Please pray for:

- A smooth formation of a government
- Policies that honour God and the people
- The nation to become less polarised and more united
- That Poland would continue to protect unborn children

Israel

1. As the war develops and civilians continue to suffer, may the nations of Europe continue to stand with Israel
2. In the information /media war, pray for balanced reporting from journalists and editors
3. Reconciliation between the descendants of Isaac and Ishmael. Faith & courage for Arabic and Messianic believers
4. May we guard our hearts and not allow them to become hardened to suffering. May the Holy Spirit guide us in our prayers.

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