



**Council of Europe**  
Slovenia 2009



This year, we are celebrating the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine (Oviedo Convention), as well as the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Europe.

The Oviedo Convention is a major achievement of the Council of Europe. It provides a general framework for the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms in the field of biomedicine, in the spirit of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

In a legally binding text, the Convention establishes principles present in deontological codes applying to daily medical practices and, as such, it represents the first European patient rights legal instrument. The Convention was also drafted in response to new challenges in biomedicine, brought about by technological, scientific, social and economic developments. While being a potential source of major improvements for individual health and well being, as well as for public health, these developments also raise concern about the possible improper use of their applications and the implications for individuals, for society and for humankind. The Convention therefore also lays down fundamental principles addressing biomedical research and new biomedical technologies. As the first and only international legally binding instrument applicable to the biomedical field, the Convention has had considerable influence on legislation and practices at national level, in particular in Central and Eastern European countries. It has also become a reference at international level.

Bioethics has been identified as a priority for the Slovenian chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, thereby reaffirming the importance of the Council of Europe's normative work for the protection of human rights in the field of biomedicine.

Science continues to develop rapidly. It is therefore necessary to remain vigilant with regard to the protection of human rights, in particular for the most vulnerable. While doing so, it is important to bear in mind the international dimension of the issues concerned, such as biomedical research carried out by European sponsors in countries with a developing economy, or transplantation linked to the problem of organ trafficking. This latter issue has been explored and concrete recommendations made in a joint Council of Europe / United Nations Study presented on 13 October 2009 in New York.

The 60th anniversary of the Council of Europe provides an excellent opportunity to reflect upon our achievements and to determine the course of our future action. On this occasion, the objectives and role of the Organisation for the protection of fundamental rights in the field of biomedicine must be reaffirmed at European and global level.

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of the Republic of Slovenia

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