



World Right-To-Die Newsletter

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Europe is center of progress

Once every two years, there is a formal meeting of delegates from the 16 European member societies of the World Federation. This group, known as Right to Die Europe (RtD Europe for short) is the umbrella organization to exchange information and co-ordinate political lobbying in Europe on matters of mutual concern.

The 2003 meeting was held in October and generously hosted by one of the smaller European Societies— ADMD Luxembourg. Approximately 50 people (delegates and partners) assembled for a two-day meeting at the Parc Hotel, Mondorf-les-Bains in Luxembourg.

These biennial meetings provide an opportunity for

delegates from the different member societies to get to know each other, exchange ideas and decide how the available cash resources should best be deployed. The aim is to lobby and influence political decisions taken by the Council of Europe and the European Parliament on right to die issues generally.

Since the previous meeting in 2001, real progress has been made in a number of directions. The most notable developments include:

- The doctor-assisted dying legislation, which came into effect in Belgium and in the Netherlands.
- The proposed legislation to allow physician-assisted dying in Luxembourg. Although this was narrowly defeated by one vote, the Vice President of ADMD Luxembourg (Jean Huss) is himself a prominent Member of Parliament. So it is likely that this will be an important issue in the country's national elections to be held in 2004.
- The local Parliaments of two separate, self-governing British Islands (Guernsey and the Isle of Man) have each voted in favour of setting up Commissions to investigate the implications of doctor-assisted dying laws. Their reports will be available in 2004.
- In France and Switzerland, Commissions have been set up to investigate end of life issues.
- Plans are afloat in Finland, Italy and Sweden to introduce Bills into their respective Parliaments in the near future.

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At the European conference of the World Federation of Right to Die Societies, pictured from left, Shahnaz Plummer, Ron Plummer (European president) and Jean Huss, vice president of ADMD Luxembourg and also a Green Party member of that country's parliament.

- In the UK, three leading members of an influential House of Lords Committee which produced a negative report on the need for euthanasia some years ago have changed their minds and now support the need for some form of legislation.

During the last year, an intern (Jenny Saunders) has been employed to monitor developments at the Council of Europe and in the European Parliament. The finance for this was partly provided by the World Federation itself and partly by donations from the French, Dutch, UK and Swiss German-speaking member societies. These funds have enabled regular information to be collated and supplied to all member societies. In turn, this has made possible some co-ordinated lobbying throughout Europe. It is hoped to improve the efficiency of this activity during the next two years but, as always, cash availability is the limiting factor.

Dealing with the formalities of the Luxembourg meeting, two of the previous Board Members retired from office. These were Claudia Wiedemann and Hermien Zoethoot. A special vote of thanks was given to Hermien who had been the Secretary of RtD Europe.

The new Board now comprises:

Elka Baezner from Exit Deutche Schweiz; Anns Baars from NVVE; Margareta Appel from Ratten Till Van Dod (Sweden) and Ron Plummer from VES UK.

After the formal meeting, there was a seminar to provide training in techniques & strategies for successful political lobbying. This was led by a professional PR / Public Affairs Consultant and convincingly showed the analytical way in which successful campaign strategies need to be organized.

The final event of the meeting was a convivial coach trip and tour of the Wine Cellars of Bernard-Massard on the banks of the beautiful Mosel River.

—Ron Plummer, President, Europe Division



Jacques Pohier, of ADMD France, is having a social drink after the meetings, with Jacqueline Herremans (left, Belgium) and Marthy Putz (right, Luxembourg).

World Fed. grows, some law successes

Luxembourg is at the crossroads of Europe, and its people are truly European, skilled in their ability to live together comfortably with their neighbours. Thus, it was an appropriate place for Right to Die-Europe, and the World Federation Board, to hold consecutive meetings at the end of October 2003.

If we calculate that the combined membership of all our 38 Member Societies around the world is about 500,000, we can reckon that at least half this number live in Europe. Also, half of the WF Board of Directors is presently European.

Much has happened in Europe this year in support of our objectives—such as the close 28 to 27 vote in the Luxembourg parliament in March, the latest official report from The Netherlands in May (still, no evidence of a “slippery slope”, a term so popular with our opponents), and the recommendations in September from a major committee of the Council of Europe for European states to collect data on end-of-life decisions and to consider the decriminalization of euthanasia.

Our meetings in Luxembourg were most successful—especially thanks to the excellent organizing skills of Kitty Jager and Rob Jonquiere (from NVVE) and Marthy Putz (ADMD-Luxembourg). Ron Plummer will be reporting on the RtD-Europe sessions: I will restrict myself to WF Board matters.

With the unfortunate exception of Derek Humphry (who had to remain in Oregon due to illness in his family), all of the Directors on the Board were present in Luxembourg. In particular, it was a pleasure for us to welcome Juan Mendoza-Vega from Colombia to his first meeting of the Board.

Assisting ADMD-L

In addition to our discussions over two days, members of the Board were able to help the ADMD-L in various ways. For example, Jacqueline Herremans, Juan Mendoza and I, with Rob Jonquiere, participated in a press conference with Jean Huss, the vice-president of ADMD-L and a leading campaigner in the national parliament for decriminalizing euthanasia—this resulted in extensive coverage in the Luxembourg papers and on television. Then, the following day, Richard MacDonald and I, again with Rob Jonquiere, appeared before the Ethics Commission of the parliament to discuss possible legislation for living wills.

New World Federation website

The Board is especially grateful to the excellent support which NVVE (in particular, Guido Hulscher) has provided

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