

Belgium Close to Allowing Euthanasia for Ill Minors

By **DAN BILEFSKY**FEB. 13, 2014

PARIS — Belgian lawmakers gave final approval on Thursday to a measure that would allow euthanasia for incurably ill children enduring insufferable pain. King Philippe is expected to sign the measure into law and make Belgium the first country to lift all age restrictions on legal, medically induced deaths.

Under the measure, approved 86 to 44 by the lower house, euthanasia would be permissible for terminally ill children who are close to death, experiencing “constant and unbearable suffering” and can show a “capacity of discernment,” meaning they can demonstrate they understand the consequences of such a choice.

The measure is an amended version of a 2002 law that allowed euthanasia for adults, and it extends this to those under 18. The legislation also requires that a request for euthanasia include the written consent of a parent.

Although the legislation had been approved by the upper house of Parliament in December and is supported by a strong majority of Belgians, it has spurred an emotional debate. Opponents, including religious leaders, some medical professionals and conservative politicians, have argued that modern medicine can alleviate suffering among the very sick and that euthanasia of minors could lead Belgian society down a perilous ethical path.

This week 160 Belgian pediatricians signed an open letter arguing that there was no urgent need for the law and that science and medicine were capable of relieving the worst suffering of terminally ill children. Demonstrators this week also took to the streets in Brussels. Some carried signs that read: “Care! Do Not Kill.”

During a parliamentary debate on Wednesday, members of the Socialist Party said that the issue was a matter of mercy and humanity. “It is our responsibility to allow everyone to live and die with dignity,” Karine Lalieux, a Socialist lawmaker, told *Le Soir*, a Belgian newspaper.

According to a survey by another newspaper, *La Libre Belgique*, three-quarters of the citizens in Belgium, a predominantly Roman Catholic but secular country, support granting incurably sick minors the option of euthanasia.

Opponents have pointed to the difficulty of judging whether a child, in particular one suffering incurable illness, has the mental capacity for making a request to die. They have also argued that a patient’s closeness to death can be a matter of opinion.

In a statement preceding the upper house vote in December, the Community of Sant’Egidio, a Catholic movement of lay people, said that expanding the legal right to euthanasia would be

“opening the door to a new kind of barbarism.” It expressed concern that sick people, especially the young, may choose to die for fear of burdening others.

Compared with the United States, where euthanasia is banned and assisted dying is allowed in only five states, Europe is relatively more permissive. Belgium is one of a few European countries that has legalized euthanasia. The Netherlands was the first to legalize euthanasia, in 2002, allowing it in special cases for seriously sick patients 12 years or older. Luxembourg allows euthanasia for adults. Switzerland allows doctors to help patients die.

But the idea of euthanasia for children is considered morally repugnant in many European countries, driven in part by memories of the Nazis, who killed thousands of children they had deemed to be mentally and physically impaired.

Questions

1. After reading this news, how do you think about the euthanasia? Did you really know clearly about this law? Share some ideas about this news.
2. Do you think that it's seriously to have an age restriction about the euthanasia? If yes, what range do you think is appropriate?
3. In Taiwan, we didn't make the euthanasia legalized in our medicine science, do you think that our country should have this law? Why or why not?
4. Why did there are 160 Belgian pediatricians said, “That there was no urgent need for the law and that science and medicine were capable of relieving the worst of terminally ill children.”?
5. What is your perspective about the supporter and the opponent debate on this controversial topic? Do you be the supporter or the opponent?
6. Do you think we should allow euthanasia for terminally ill minors? Why or why not? Share some ideas.
7. If you are a doctor, will you make your patients euthanasia? Why or why not?
8. If you are the terminally ill person that can't move and you don't know which day you will heal, will you accept euthanasia treatment? Why or why not?
9. Euthanasia, a quiet and easy death, we also called “mercy killing” . Do you think euthanasia is to save the patient or kill them ? Why would you think that ?
10. Do you read any article from the internet, newspaper or magazine about euthanasia? Tell us your opinions after you read ?

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/14/world/europe/belgium-close-to-enacting-sick-child-euthanasia-law.html>