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Diffusion of euthanasia law

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Abstract

Euthanasia law emerged in the Netherlands and Belgium in the context of widely held values, of a particular political and social structure, and of a specific organization of health care and of the medical profession. In my presentation I hope to predict developments regarding euthanasia law in some other European countries. To do so I will take three factors into account.

A first factor that can help to explain changes in law with respect to euthanasia is changes in widely held values relating to the end of life. This sort of value change is known for many countries by the findings of the European Values study. Although these findings have many shortcomings, by clustering the answers in underlying values we can show value changes in different countries.

A second factor that can help to explain changes in euthanasia law is the accessibility of the political system. Four characteristics of the political system are supposed to play a role in relation to accessibility: the structure of political cleavages, the political institutional structure, political culture and temporary changes in parliamentary power relationships. By comparing countries on these characteristics we will know more about the likelihood that euthanasia law will be proposed/accepted.

A third factor that can be taken in account is related with European unification. Free circulation of people can lead to changes in national values and provide those who have adopted the new values opportunities to live according them (for example by 'sin-tourism'). The result is not only people realizing their values but also challenging the national policy by breaking taboos.

Keywords: diffusion of law; comparison of law; health law