

The justification text on the proposal for the directive on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes, MEP Esko Seppanen's draft ITRE Committee opinion, 30.1.2009

The objective of the Commission proposal is to lay down a new Directive revising Directive 86/609/EEC. The new draft directive is a long step forward in implementing the 3Rs principles (replacement, reduction and refinement and of animals in experiments) and relieving suffering of the animals used in experimentation. One day the scientific community will succeed in developing alternative methods for animal experiments, but the time has not come yet.

Animal testing and especially the use in research of non-human primates (NHP) is a sensitive and controversial topic owing to an increasing awareness of animal welfare among the citizens. Many animal rights NGOs use good arguments against animal testing: it is cruel, it is poor scientific practice, it cannot reliably predict the effects in humans, the costs outweigh the benefits and animals have an intrinsic right not to be used for experimentation.

Reflecting such views, the European Parliament in a Written Declaration of March 2007 urged the revision of Directive 809/609/EC "as an opportunity to: a) make ending the use of apes and wild-caught monkeys in scientific experiments an urgent priority, and b) establish a timetable for replacing the use of all primates in scientific experiments with alternatives". The draftsman also signed this declaration.

In the draft directive there is a ban on the use of Great Apes in experiments, and in the EU the last use of chimpanzees derives from the year 1999. Therefore, this is not a problem.

The problem however, is that there is a need to use smaller NHPs because, compared to humans, they have more similar (although not identical) anatomical, physiological and immunological systems than any other species and they are susceptible to diseases that may not be present in other species. Therefore, the use of primates remains unavoidable in several essential research areas for the welfare of humans.

In basic and applied research, animal testing is used, for instance in finding cure or relief in the following areas: AIDS, type 2 diabetes, tuberculosis, malaria, stroke, cancer, hepatitis, SARS,

neuro-degenerative diseases (Parkinson, Alzheimer), multiple sclerosis, poliomyelitis, fertility research, dengue haemorrhagic fever and drug abuse.

To ban NHP testing in these fields will result in a significant reduction in the amount of biomedical research undertaken in Europe to the detriment of human and animal health and welfare.

In the near future, it is not possible to establish a time table for replacing NHPs with alternatives. The latest scientific knowledge about alternatives is expressed in the SCHER report "The need for non-human primates in biomedical research, production and testing of products and devices". SCHER provides the Commission with scientific advice. The same opinion is largely shared by Academia. Thus, the above cited Parliament declaration may not be correct when stating that "advanced technology and techniques provide alternative methods that are proving to be more efficient and reliable than primate experiments".

Whenever it is not possible to avoid animal experiments, it is essential to ensure that animals still used in research can have the highest protection and welfare and that experiments be tightly regulated. The draftsman agrees fully with the purpose and the scope of the Directive.