

French Parliament debates legalization of terminal sedation

March 10 2015, by Sylvie Corbet



Demonstrators gather near the French National Assembly holding white silhouettes as part of a silent protest against euthanasia, in Paris, Tuesday March 10, 2015. France's Parliament will start a debate Tuesday on a bill aimed at allowing doctors to keep terminally ill patients sedated until death comes, amid national debate about whether to legalize euthanasia. Slogans read: ' Lets Relieve but do not Kill'. (AP Photo/Remy de la Mauviniere)

France's Parliament started debate Tuesday on a bill aimed at allowing doctors to keep terminally ill patients sedated until death comes, amid national debate about whether to legalize euthanasia.

The proposed bill—backed by the Socialist government—stops short of recommending lethal injections and avoids the terms euthanasia or assisted suicide.

Prime minister Manuel Valls praised "a reform that proclaims the right to die peacefully, in dignity and without suffering," in a speech at France's lower house of Parliament.

The measure would give people "the right to deep, continuous sedation until death" at the patient's request, but only when their condition is life-threatening in the short term.

It would also force doctors to follow end-of-life instructions whether they are expressed by the patients themselves or written in advance, if they are no longer able to express their will.

The vote is scheduled next week at France's lower house of Parliament. The bill will then be debated by the Senate.

The measure has stirred debate in France.

Five high-profile Christian, Muslim and Jewish leaders on Monday called for the preservation of "the prohibition of killing" in a joint column published by Le Monde.

On Tuesday, about 200 protesters gathered near the lower house of Parliament to denounce the bill as amounting to disguised euthanasia. Another protest by about 200 pro-euthanasia campaigners later criticized the bill as not going far enough.



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Doctors are also divided about the idea. So-called terminal or palliative sedation can involve medicating patients until they die naturally of their illnesses, or until they starve.

The method doesn't actively kill patients. But some doctors say it can mean patients are sedated for weeks before they die, and that it may be more humane to euthanize.



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The bill specifically mentions that "artificial nutrition and hydration" are considered as medical treatments that could be stopped or not started at the patient's request.

French debate over end-of-life legislation resurfaced last year over the case of comatose Frenchman Vincent Lambert. His wife wants doctors

to stop life support but his parents disagree. The case is pending at the European Court of Human Rights.



Pro-euthanasia demonstrators gather near the French National Assembly in Paris, Tuesday March 10, 2015 as France's Parliament starts a debate on a bill aimed at allowing doctors to keep terminally ill patients sedated until death comes, amid national debate about whether to legalize euthanasia. Sign reads: Francois Lets act like Holland. Euthanasia has been occurring in Holland for many years. (AP Photo/Remy de la Mauviniere)

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