

Italy OKs living wills amid long-running euthanasia debate

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Pope Francis, center, arrives for his weekly general audience in the Paul VI Hall at the Vatican, Wednesday, Dec. 13, 2017. (L'Osservatore Romano/Pool Photo via AP)

Italy's Senate gave final approval Thursday to a law allowing Italians to write living wills and refuse artificial nutrition and hydration, the latest step in the Roman Catholic nation's long-running and agonizing debate over euthanasia and end-of-life issues.

As soon as the 180-71 vote was tabulated, cheers erupted outside parliament among a small group of right-to-die activists who saw the bill as a victory after several high-profile euthanasia cases prompted [criminal prosecutions](#).

"Of course, we are still missing the legalization of euthanasia that we'll propose to the next parliament," said spokesman Marco Cappato of the right-to-die movement.

Cappato is currently on trial in Milan for having helped bring blind paraplegic Fabbio Antoniani to Switzerland earlier this year to die in an assisted suicide clinic.

A day before the Senate passed the bill, the Milan courtroom heard Antoniani's pre-recorded anguished testimony of how he couldn't bear to live another day, comments that reportedly brought even the prosecutor to tears.

The law's passage Thursday comes as the Vatican itself has taken up end-of-life issues anew. A series of conferences have emphasized the need for palliative care and reinforced Catholic doctrine, which requires only "ordinary" care be provided to the dying, not "extraordinary" care that extends life at all costs.

In a November speech taken by Italians as an endorsement of the pending legislation, Pope Francis repeated the church's opposition to [euthanasia](#) but also rejected the "therapeutic obstinacy" sometimes practiced by doctors when the benefits of heroic therapies to patients are debatable, negligible or non-existent.

While church teaching considers artificial nutrition and hydration to fall under the "ordinary care" that must be provided to the dying, the parliamentary debate over the living will and its provision that Italians could refuse food and water generated relatively little Catholic opposition.

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