

Italy adopts 'living wills' despite church opposition

14 December 2017

Catholic Italy adopted a law Thursday which will allow patients to refuse life-prolonging treatment despite opposition from the Church, which warned it was a dangerous step towards assisted suicide.

The Senate gave the [green light](#) to "living wills", which determine the [medical treatment](#) given to people suffering from a [terminal illness](#) or a life-threatening injury—and enshrine their right to refuse care.

The powerful Italian Bishops' Conference (CEI) slammed the law as "protecting [doctors](#) by relieving them of any responsibility, protecting the public health service... but apparently doing little to protect those suffering".

The legislation, which includes a provision to ensure doctors can be conscientious objectors, was backed by both the ruling centre-left Democratic Party (PD) as well as the anti-establishment Five Star Movement (M5S).

It will allow patients to refuse not only medicine but food and water.

Pope Francis has said that while euthanasia is wrong, doctors must not provide excessive treatment in a futile bid to resist death.

Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni described the law, expected to be the last this government will push through before a general election in March, as "a step forwards for human dignity".

"Living wills" are legal documents that specify the type of medical care an individual wants in the event he or she is unable to communicate. They already exist in other large European countries from Britain to Spain.

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