WRITTEN QUESTION P-0438/02
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to the Commission

Subject: Embryo stem cell research

The AP news agency quoted Philippe Busquin, the Member of the Commission responsible for research, on 31 January in a reaction to the German Bundestag's vote on the use of human embryo stem cells in research as saying that 'German researchers are now in a position to participate fully in EU-financed research projects investigating the use of embryo stem cells in curing diseases such as Parkinson's or Alzheimer's or heart defects'.

The bill headed 'No destructive embryo research - prohibit imports of human embryo stem cells in principle - permit only under strict conditions', which the Bundestag adopted by a majority, stipulates that 'a law shall be adopted to combat the destruction of further embryos for the purposes of extracting human embryo stem cells. The importation of human embryo stem cells is to be restricted to existing stem cell lines established by a specified cut-off date. The setting of such a date ensures that, for the purposes of importing human embryo stem cells into Germany, the killing of further embryos to extract stem cells is prevented.'

Commissioner Busquin's words represent a fine-tuning of the Commission's position. In its modified proposal on the 6th Framework Programme for research of 22 November 2001 and its statement to the Research Council on 5 December 2001, the Commission merely stated the view that the production of embryos for research purposes, including nuclear transfer, was excluded. On the issue of embryo stem cell research, it was not specified whether any embryo stem cell line can be used, or only those produced by a cut-off date. What cut-off date does the Commission consider appropriate? How does it propose to verify that the cut-off date arrangements are adhered to in practice?