

Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri



**The Identification of the Human Body:
Bioethical Aspects of Biometrics**

26th November 2010

Abstract

The opinion deals with new techniques for identification of each human being through the detection, by means of electronic sensors, of specific physical and behavioural characteristics (for example fingerprints, voice, iris, retina...) which are reproduced in the form of mathematical sequences and can be stored in appropriate electronic databases. All these techniques for the detection of identity, although heterogeneous and still under development, have led to the formation of a specific subject area called "biometrics", which involves electronics, computer science, statistics, medicine, psychology, ethics and law.

The NBC, as well as emphasizing the undeniable advantages offered by the use of these new technologies for the protection of public order and the security of commercial transactions, also highlights the possible risks that may arise from uncontrolled misuse. The biometric data may in fact be linked with personal data relating to health conditions, tastes, habits, leading to new and more invasive forms of control or social exclusion. For this reason, the NBC recommends a ban on all forms of sectorial and discriminatory application, resulting in an improper use of these technologies, apart from the strictly necessary functions, or which exclude from the enjoyment of services, those lacking particular physical features (*biometric disability*). This general measure should be accompanied by the discipline, both at European and international level, of new and more meaningful aspects of the individual right to privacy. Attention is drawn in particular to the need to provide a right of access, for each individual involved, to the biometric databases that may concern him in order to know what information is collected about him, by whom, for what purpose, since when and for how long. Equally important would be the legislative recognition of the "right to oblivion", providing a reliable and transparent process of erasure of improperly acquired data.