



French groups against shale and coal oil and gas*

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On 2 August 2013

Subject: Arrests at Balcombe (UK) during a demonstration against exploratory drilling for shale gas

Dear Member of the European Parliament

On Friday 26 July, sixteen opponents to shale gas exploration and exploitation were arrested by the police at Balcombe in Sussex, following two days of a non-violent demonstration next to an exploratory shale gas prospecting site⁽¹⁾. About a dozen of these people must now appear in court charged with having prevented trucks from the Cuadrilla Resources company from gaining access to the drilling site. Among them are two teenagers aged 15 and 17, who have received a summons for 6 August next at the Crawley Juvenile Court.

You will note that these arrests took place within days of the British Government announcing its decision to reduce the rate of taxation on earnings from this new resource to 30%, instead of the 62 % charged on conventional oil and gas from the North Sea. In so doing, it is offering industrialists one of Europe's most generous tax breaks. What is more, the Growth and Infrastructure Act takes matters even further by facilitating gas industry projects, to the detriment of local communities and private property and in flagrant disregard of the precautionary principle⁽²⁾.

Deeply concerned at the loss of the high-quality environment in which their community has always lived, the demonstrators justifiably consider, having regard to recent statements on the subject by European technical and scientific experts⁽³⁾, that no gas and oil company is able to guarantee that very deep drilling using hydraulic fracturing (fracking) – the technique systematically employed even during production tests – can be carried out without risk to the environment. Many expert reports published in the USA, but also in Australia and in Europe, as well as innumerable witness statements from persons living next to hydraulic fracturing wells, have all shown that very deep drilling and the use of this technique lead in both the short and the long term to grave and even irreversible damage: the production of toxic effluents, pollution of surface water and the water table, soil sterilization, ruined landscapes, air pollution, seismic activity, accidents and leaks during the transport of hydrocarbons, blowouts, serious, even critical impact on physical and mental health and, to crown it all, a worsening of the greenhouse effect.

How can any European State treat as unlawful peaceful mobilisation by parents and grandparents whose concern is not to bequeath to our children a world rendered uninhabitable? How can determined but peaceful action by young people defending their very future be treated as a threat to the peace? What's plain for all to see is that our western nations are growing madder by the day. It seems these unconventional hydrocarbons are for the authorities of some European States the "last chance saloon" where citizens' respectable but oil-intoxicated representatives let go of all normal self-control. By what right can the police, who are paid for by citizens, intervene against those citizens' interests? In any case, several articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have in recent times been seriously mangled by the authorities of European countries, when faced with mobilisation to defend the

20130802.GBR.Balcombe-Cuadrilla.NonAuxArrestationsDeManifestantsPacifiques.L.Coll-Eurodeputes.English

* Collectifs citoyens opposés à l'exploration et à l'exploitation des hydrocarbures « non conventionnels », à la fracturation du sous-sol, aux forages extrêmes et appelant à une véritable transition énergétique pérenne.

environment and citizens' quality of life. We cannot allow this flouting of a text universally recognised as the basis for the conduct of human affairs to become the norm, as is unfortunately the case in so many countries throughout the world.

We cannot censure strongly enough these arrests at a time when the Cuadrilla company is in several respects in breach of its planning consent⁽⁴⁾.

Likewise, we deeply regret the intimidation tactics used against demonstrators during arrests. One was handcuffed face downward on the ground, while others were the victims of deliberate actions intended to cause physical suffering. This is substantiated by the BBC report and several eye-witness statements.

We call on you today to do your utmost to ensure that citizens' elementary rights are upheld in all the Member States of the European Union, in compliance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We call on you to remind each Member State that European citizens defending their elementary rights to health, safe access to water supplies, water and soil quality, etc. should be treated benignly and not as delinquents, let alone as terrorists.

Thanking you in advance for the attention you accord these lines and for your determination to defend the interests of your constituents, whatever pressures may be brought to bear by the representatives of the gas and oil industries, we assure you of our vigilant determination and remain, dear Members of the European Parliament,

Yours sincerely,

(1) BBC report on the Balcombe arrests: article and video

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-sussex-23462586>

(2) <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2013/27/contents/enacted>

(3) French National Assembly – Hearing 2013 04 1; statement by Mr. Christian Besson, International Energy Agency (IEA)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BEwVV6qrg>

(4) <http://frackingdigest.co.uk/wsc.htm>

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Attendees

Members of the European Parliament