

EPSU response to EU Commission Consultation on Unconventional fossil fuels (e.g. shale gas) in Europe

Adopted at the EPSU Standing Committee on Public Utilities, 26 February 2013.

The exploitation of shale gas is causing much controversy. Some see it as a new way of bringing fossil fuels to the market and causing an upset of the gas market leading to lower prices such as in the US. Others argue that the environmental and social consequences are negative and the contribution to CO2 emissions detrimental to addressing climate change.

- EPSU rejects the exploitation of shale gas (and oil) given that the impact on the environment such as ground water with the current state of technology and knowledge of the longer term consequences is negative. We further recognize that there is considerable public opposition given that much of these longer term effects on the life of citizens is unclear and including the contribution to CO2 emissions.
- Research into the exploration of shale gas, and if under strict conditions and control, with different techniques and if there is no impact on the environment, is something EPSU does not oppose. Learning to assess the geological and hydrological circumstances under which exploration is possible is of interest to society. This should also include how to prevent that shale gas contributes to CO2 emissions.
- We are skeptical about research that is conducted by private enterprise. There is the risk that profit motives dominate over public interests. The current state of the banking sector or the role Enron has played, are clear examples that this is not an imaginary risk. Such research that is controversial and can have important consequences is best done by public research institutions, and under stringent control which should include a broad range of stakeholders and including from critical organizations.
- The European Commission and Member States should be prevented to give a free

hand to the large multinational (oil) companies who can shift their resources, investment and plants to other non-EU locations, and could abandon a site. It would leave a region or Member State with the long-term negative legacy. This underlines that before allowing any research (and let alone exploration) the legal framework and responsibilities (polluter pays principle) be very clearly defined.

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