

Resolution 2140 (2016)¹

The exploration and exploitation of non-conventional hydrocarbons in Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Non-conventional hydrocarbons, such as shale gas and oil, have shaken the global energy market. The exploration and exploitation of these resources mainly refer to hydraulic fracturing ("fracking"), a technique for tapping underground natural gas by injecting high-pressure water and chemicals to break rocks, with a view to liberating the gas and oil they contain. This controversial procedure raises a number of concerns related to public health and environmental protection.
2. The weak economic viability of hydraulic fracturing in Europe, coupled with public acceptance issues, should discourage exploitation of unconventional fossil fuels. However, since hydraulic fracturing is authorised in some European countries, a thorough assessment of its feasibility and implications remains a task of urgent practical importance.
3. The fight against climate change and water scarcity is vital for the survival of humankind. By signing the Paris Agreement on combating climate change, States committed to keeping the increase in the global average temperature below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, with the aim of limiting the increase to 1.5°C. States should therefore not adopt energy policies which could impede the achievement of this goal. The Parliamentary Assembly strongly supports the efforts of States to comply with their international obligations in this field. Non-conventional hydrocarbon production is more harmful in terms of climate change than coal, so will require a greater reduction in fossil fuel production elsewhere. Council of Europe member States should focus on developing sustainable alternatives.
4. Oil producers have increased production in response to shale gas exploitation by the United States, which has reduced oil prices and returns on investments in renewables. However, as 75% of identified fossil fuels cannot be used without a climate change catastrophe, member States should prioritise long-term investment in renewables irrespective of short-term oil prices.
5. Recalling its [Resolution 1977 \(2014\)](#) on energy diversification as a fundamental contribution to sustainable development, the Assembly recommends that member States diversify their energy supplies and prioritise the use of cleaner and safer energy resources by focusing on renewables, including solar, wind, hydraulic, geothermal, biomass and marine power. Fiscal initiatives and planning law in member States should favour renewables and member States should also prioritise policies promoting energy efficiency and reducing energy consumption. Member States have the opportunity to take global leadership in renewable technology and co-operation to help the developing world to grow with its fair share of energy in a sustainable way. Member States should encourage the transfer of renewable energy technologies to developing countries to avoid associated climate change. This can include extending networks of solar forests across southern Europe and northern Africa and pioneering carbon capture.

1. *Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 25 November 2016 (see [Doc. 14196](#), report of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, rapporteur: Mr Geraint Davies).*



6. The Assembly is deeply concerned about threats to the environment and public health related to the exploration and exploitation of shale gas and oil, in particular in relation to water contamination, air quality and local environmental harm. In light of the above considerations, the Assembly urges all member States to clarify and strengthen their legislation in this field, including bans on fracking in favour of cleaner energy alternatives.

7. Pending a possible ban on fracking, the Assembly recommends limiting and controlling the exploration and exploitation of non-conventional hydrocarbons by adopting strict environmental regulations which:

7.1. impose a compulsory environmental impact assessment for any fracking project, including the impact on air and water quality and climate change;

7.2. ensure that the industrial companies involved comply with all air and water quality regulations and oblige companies to disclose the nature and amount of chemicals used during the process of fracking;

7.3. restrict overall upstream fugitive emissions to below 1%, with those at the fracking site no higher than 0.1% of natural gas production; ensure that "green completions" are mandatory, namely that all wells are capped and the methane is captured with no venting or burning (flaring); put in place comprehensive monitoring of shale gas and oil operations through environmental agencies, taking into consideration the need for more accurate top-down measurements of methane releases;

7.4. ensure the effective criminal prosecution of companies failing to comply with all the above-mentioned regulations, including the payment of compensation for environmental damage;

7.5. encourage the oil and gas industry to follow the best up-to-date drilling practices and to adopt safer and more environmentally friendly techniques; ensure funding of independent high-quality research on the risks of exploration and exploitation of non-conventional hydrocarbons to inform regulation;

7.6. ensure transparency, by providing full information on fracking projects to citizens, and ensuring their involvement in decision-making processes when it comes to energy projects in their communities; protect areas with great environmental and cultural value from drilling operations which may have a visual or other impact on the landscape.

8. The Assembly recommends that member States:

8.1. promote research and investment in energy efficiency and the development of greener and safer energy sources such as renewable energies, offering energy security and limiting environmental and health hazards;

8.2. accelerate efforts to draw up a trans-European plan, with a view to ironing out the fluctuations in energy supply linked to the regional use of solitary renewable energy sources such as solar or wind power.

9. The Assembly recommends that free trade deals involving member States, including the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement (CETA), help countries to fulfil their obligations under the United Nations Conference on Climate Change 2015 (COP21) and to freely and fairly safeguard their environments.