

To: the Steering Committee of the European Science and Technology Network on Unconventional Hydrocarbon Extraction

As representatives of European civil society opposed to the extraction of unconventional fossil fuels using the highly controversial technology of high volume hydraulic fracturing, we take note with concern of the different initiatives at the European level aiming at furthering the research and understanding of this technology of hydraulic fracturing, that are underlining the intention of the European Commission to actively support the take-off of this very controversial technology. By this we mainly mean:

- shifting the money originally meant for researching on green energy in the *Horizon 2020* Programme of the EU, to the research in the field of extracting unconventional fossil fuels by means of fracking, while trying to rebrand them as green energy resources,
- the newly launched initiative of the European Science and Technology Network on Unconventional Hydrocarbon Extraction.

These two initiatives driven by the European Commission have, insofar as we can observe, a very limited scope of emphasizing the inherent dangers of high volume hydraulic fracturing, obvious from the experiences outside Europe. Both are focusing on the need to deepen the information by studying its impacts via a “learning-by-doing” mechanism, as if fracking impacts could not be studied starting from the experiences of other countries, from where there are more and more alarm signals calling for an immediate ban of this technology.

We also noted with concern and reacted when the European Commission has decided to go further with the plans to continue extracting unconventional fossil fuels, despite the results of the public consultation in 2013 and despite the vote of the European Parliament, the only democratically elected institution of the European Union and disregarding the massive opposition of civil society in most EU Member States with fracking plans. As members of civil society, we are growing increasingly concerned by the huge democratic deficit of the current course of the fracking debate in Europe, which the European Commission has chosen not to address. It is against this background that we call upon the European Commission to finally do what it is preaching and listen to the voice of concerned civil society, informally organized throughout Europe, yet very informed and updated with all the relevant peer-reviewed scientific studies related to the serious impacts of fracking on public health and the environment.

We watched the live webstream of the Launch event of your Network and we noted with interest the declarations of the Network’s Steering Committee that civil society can freely join the debates of this network. Yet, in practice, we noted that the Network did not make any effort to involve civil society in the kick-off meeting, as there was no targeted invitation to civil society, or a proper publicizing of the initiative in the Member States, so that the information reaches the concerned citizens. Some members of our network came across it via our communication network, yet not coming from the organizers. At this point, we would like to highlight a key aspect to the active and effective involvement of the civil society in the fracking debate at the EU level: given the grass-roots structure of civil society fighting fracking across Europe, **its members often lack the financial means to participate in international meetings.**

Without proper involvement of civil society, meaning directly targeting them with invitations and supporting the participation costs, as it was the case with the kick-off meeting in Brussels on 8th of July 2014, we can only regard this initiative of the European Commission as another way to allow for more pro-fracking lobbying, given the biased structure of the participants, from the

very outset. We therefore consider this mistake of the Network has to be addressed right away and immediate measures have to be taken to mitigate it, so that the next meetings of the Network do not repeat the same mistakes.

We have remarked that in such ‘public debates’, the voice of concerned citizens is rarely heard, simply because they are not in a position to attend such events. At the proceedings of the launch event of the Network, there were three very active representatives of civil society from two Member States, working voluntarily on the issue of fracking, just like many others in the European anti-fracking network, who found themselves in a room full of representatives of the oil and gas lobby groups located in Brussels. They had to pay for the trip, as the Network underlined it will not cover travel expenses. Their presence was at some point jeopardized by the financial aspect and the short notice, and if they haven’t made special efforts to attend the meeting, there wouldn’t have been any representative of concerned citizens in the room to speak out. This creates a very imbalanced situation of forces, basically excluding the civil society from the debate. It is not for the first time when such a debate on the very controversial issue of fracking is practically closing its doors to the civil society in Europe, it has happened in other occasions, too, at the presentation of the results of the public consultation on fracking and fossil fuels in Europe, held on the 7th of June, 2013, in Brussels.

Therefore, taking into account the structure of the European anti-fracking network, made almost entirely of citizens and small and rather weak NGOs fighting fracking at local and national level, and also given the massive importance of the debate over fracking, **we call up on the European Commission and the board of the Network to adopt a special approach when dealing with it, tailored to its needs.** Our main concern is that, due to the lack of financial means, as one of the main restraints of grassroots campaigning, our representatives will not be able to participate at the meetings of the Network, leaving out of the debate the most important voice, that of the citizens that have to live with the impacts of fracking. We are therefore requesting you to have a **special line of budgeting dedicated to the voices of the concerned citizens** opposed to fracking in Member States be it on the grounds of the already existing evidence, or based on their own experience with fracking.

At this point, we want to underline that our approach, as well as our experiences with fracking, as concerned citizens being often at the forefront of the physical fight against fracking going on in Europe – we imagine you are informed about the growing number of anti-fracking resistance camps all across Europe and the world – is different from that of the Brussels-based NGOs, often lacking the grassroots perspective of the fighters on the ground. We firmly believe that it’s exactly the grassroots perspective of the civil society that the Network can by no means leave out of the room. From this background, we are calling upon the European Commission to fix this bias in the representation of the civil society it has not addressed so far and have **dedicated allowances for the participation of 3 delegates of the European Anti-fracking Network at all the meetings of the Network.**

The European Anti-fracking Network formed in March 2014, in France, in St. Christol les Ales, as an impressive example of grassroots mobilization across Europe, with representatives from 19 countries in Europe and the neighboring Maghreb area meeting to discuss about the attack of fracking on democracy and environment across Europe (and the Maghreb area).

We are fully aware of the lack of knowledge of the European Commission about the structures of the grassroots coordination against fracking across Europe and we believe it is time the European Commission acknowledges the existence of the grassroots movement against fracking across Europe and considers us as legitimate partners in the hydraulic fracturing debate. In order to

change this pattern of the European Commission failing to involve the grassroots civil society groups across Europe and also for the Commission to understand the structure and the motivations of its members, we are also calling on the Network **to organize, as soon as possible, a separate meeting (and, if necessary, subsequent meetings) with the stakeholders from civil society, that are actively and informally opposing fracking across Europe.**

So far we didn't have the occasion to directly inform the European Commission about our position and shortcomings, as it's the case for fracking proponents, who have been reportedly doing a very intense lobbying with the European Commission, while being paid big money by the oil and gas industry. We, as civil society representatives, receive **no financing** for our activity and aim to engage in a direct dialogue with the European Commission (with no intermediaries, such as the Representations of the European Commission in Member States, with limited mandate). Yet we have no means to finance such meetings with the representatives of the European Commission, this is why consider it is the duty of the Network and of the European Commission to ensure the financing of such meeting(s) of the European Commission with civil society, given the seriousness of the issue of fracking. We are therefore proposing a meeting of representatives of up to 2 members per country targeted by fracking (actively or remotely) with the representatives of the Steering Committee of the Network, in which we will be able to give an overview of how hard it is to involve in the fracking debate at the European level and to discuss about how the European Commission engage the citizens more effectively in this vital debate for the future of EU. Even though the European Commission has financing aimed at involving the NGOs in European debates, **we, as a network of grassroots, not organized as legal entities, are not eligible under such financing schemes.**

We also consider that inviting **harmed citizens** from countries where fracking has already taken off, especially from the USA, but not limited to it, is crucial to having an informed and complete debate about the impacts of fracking. Also the presence of scientists who conducted studies on the impact of fracking in USA, Canada etc., is of crucial importance for the Network. It is to be made sure that all the opinions, not only those hailing the "shale gas revolution" are represented. Of course, the European Commission should also bear the costs for having these very precious guests to the network.

Furthermore, given the multiple effects of fracking on public health documented in the USA, we consider that, the **Health Directorate** should be a part of this network, as well as the **Directorate for Agriculture**, as fracking often collides with the interest of agriculture. Given the fact that more Member States have challenged the decisions of the local and regional councils to ban fracking, we consider that representatives of the Committees of the Regions should also be a part of the network, to present their view on the involvement of the local communities.

The European Commission has so far leaned a deaf ear to all the concerns of citizens and also to the incredible democratic breaches of human rights and democracy happening right now in various communities opposing fracking all over Europe. The European Commission has a chance to correct the wrong it has been done so far and to begin to genuinely involve European citizens in the serious debates that will fundamentally affect the health and the future of generations to come, such as the debate on fracking.

Furthermore, regarding the pillar of the Horizon 2020 Programme dedicated to fracking, linked to the initiative of this Network, we consider that there is enough body of evidence gathered from countries where the technology of high volume hydraulic fracturing has been employed, and that producing new studies based on new European experimental "playgrounds", rather than just using the already existing body of evidence from exploitations elsewhere in order to inform an

obvious and sound political choice means nothing more than “reinventing the wheel”. Financing studies about making “fracking sure”, which we consider to be an oxymoron, means using public money to study a type of energy that is in clear conflict with the goals of greening the European economy, an objective strongly supported by the majority of the EU citizens, and against the right of the citizens to a healthy environment. From the experiences across the world, it has been proven that extracting unconventional fossil fuels cannot be done safely; therefore there is no need to continue investing money in a technology that has proved to be impossible to be kept under control.

Bragging itself as the ‘green continent’, Europe should instead learn from all the scientific information already existing elsewhere and decide as soon as possible in favor of a pan-European ban on fracking, on the grounds of **the precautionary** principle stated by art.191 of the Treaty of the European Union. Therefore we call on the European Commission to demand that Member States to enact a moratorium until the legislative gaps identified in the report of September 2012 have been addressed and until this Network has completed its research in three years’ time. We consider a moratorium on unconventional oil and natural gas extraction (fracking) the only appropriate and ethical course of action while scientific and medical knowledge on the impacts of fracking continues to emerge.

We affirm once again the opposition to the massive shift of focus of the European Commission, away from renewables, and its more and more obvious push for unconventional fossil fuels in the name of a false energy independency, argument that has been undermined even by the European Commissioner for Energy, Mr. Günther Öttinger, who recently stated that shale gas will only cover for 10% of the EU consumption. We therefore strongly oppose embarking on an irreversible avenue towards nowhere, especially when there’s absolutely any benefit for it, except that of the oil and gas companies and of the financial sector supporting them and call again for an immediate ban on fracking, before it’s too late.