

FRACKING, ENERGY AT ANY PRICE?

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Yesterday we heard the news that the Popular Party of the Basque Country, surprisingly, joined EH Bildu and PSE-EE to approve in committee a legislative proposal that vetoes the practice of extracting hydrocarbons using the hydraulic fracturing technique, better known as *fracking*, in the Basque Country. Surprise flooded Parliament. After forming a bloc in support of fracking together with the PNV during months of debate, the PP has taken an unexpected turn at the last moment. Change of opinion based on careful reflection? Sudden ecological awareness? Political mysteries aside, the concept *fracking* is very present on the street. Some in favor, some against. It leaves no one indifferent.

Hydraulic fracturing, better known as *fracking*, is a technique applied to the extraction of the so-called "unconventional gas", "[shale gas](#)" or [shale gas](#). Briefly explained, the process consists of injecting water, sand and various chemicals into underground reserves at high pressure, to fracture the rocks and thus release gas and oil.

In the benefits section, the most noteworthy and fundamental are that this process enables the exploitation of previously unattainable resources (the International Energy Agency points to an increase in gas reserves of up to 250 years) and that it allows extracting large quantities of gas, thus assuring many countries an indigenous energy supply. In fact, due to this characteristic, the implementation of *fracking* is experiencing an unstoppable boom in the extractive industry: it is carried out in approximately 90% of operating wells, and most of the new ones have already they have required it. As a result of the "success" (only economic?) obtained in the United States, countries like Poland or the United Kingdom have begun the first tests of this new extractive trend. However, as a counterpoint, France is about to revoke the exploitation licenses through *fracking* already granted to some companies.

On the other hand, in the section on damage caused, one of the main negative impacts is the contamination of aquifers and surface water. A part of the injected toxic mixture will remain forever underground while another part will return to the surface to be stored in rafts. Any failure or leak can lead to contamination of water systems. Additionally, injected water can displace radioactive material and heavy metals to the surface. On the other hand, there are no effective means of adequately purifying wastewater stored in ponds. The evaporation of toxic wastewater stored in ponds in the open air, as well as small gas leaks (between 4% and 8% of the gas extracted according to Cornell University), cause air pollution.

As if this were not enough, to the environmental problems caused, we must add the health conditions derived from *fracking*. According to many specialized sources, including the journal *Endocrinology* or the University of Missouri (headed by Susan Nagel), 100 of the more than 750 chemical compounds used in hydraulic fracturing have a very negative effect on health. The evaporation of these substances stored in the open air in the waste water, can reach our body through the respiratory tract. There are many cases of cancer generated to a large extent by these substances, respiratory difficulties, headaches, lethargic behaviors, nosebleeds, skin problems, even difficulties in the formation of the fetus and in childbirth, presence of methane in the urine due to consumption polluted water, etc.

Are we willing to obtain energy in exchange for such an excessive social and environmental cost?

There are no comments yet.