In a meeting organised by the European commission on Monday 29 June, stakeholders were invited to provide their views on the effectiveness of the EU recommendation on shale gas. The aim of the meeting was to assist the EU executive in reviewing the non-binding guidelines it set in January 2014 on environmental protection for fracking projects so as to decide whether further measures are needed.

Representatives of the oil and gas industry said that the recommendation is sufficient to cover shale gas activity across the EU, which is very low in any case. They argued that, with only 14 wells drilled in the EU last year, adopting further measures on top of the existing framework did not make sense.

A survey conducted by Milieu and presented at the meeting, confirms that the industry is of the view that the principles of the recommendation were reflected in national legislation and already applied in practice in their country before its adoption.
Furthermore, the adoption of the recommendation did not result in any changes in planning, licensing, legislation or policy, or improve investor confidence or alleviate public concerns. The survey is now being finalised and its findings will be presented to the public by the end of the year.

NGO representatives, such as Friends of the Earth Europe and Chemtrust, present at the meeting, refuted the arguments above, by reiterating that the pace of development in the industry is not relevant to the discussion and that now is the time to regulate fracking activities given the low oil prices.

They added that the commission's recommendation was lacking clarity and recalled that there were gaps in the 17 directives that applied to fracking, particularly the environmental liability directive, meaning new EU legislation was needed.

The commission in turn presented the results of a flash Eurobarometer survey conducted recently in the member states where such projects are already or soon taking place. The survey, which will be presented by the commission in a few weeks, showed that there were divergent views between and within the member states.

Respondents in favour of shale gas projects welcomed the jobs and growth opportunities they created for local communities, while those of the opinion that fracking presents challenges were mostly worried about the impact of shale gas exploration on water and air quality, health and even tourism. The survey also found that the majority of respondents would like fracking activities to be regulated at national level.

Astrid Schomaker, representing DG environment, summed up the debate, concluding that that there was no consensus on whether the EU executive should revise or extend the scope of the recommendation, or adopt additional measures.

She added that she took note of the arguments raised on the need of raising awareness, increasing transparency on chemicals used, improving well integrity, as well as the proposal to create a single authority for the industry.
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