

Will Germany restrict the possibilities for the development of shale gas fields?

Norbert Röttgen (CDU), the minister for environmental protection in the federal government, announced in an interview for the *Westfälische Nachrichten* newspaper on 29 July that an expert survey on the environmental impact of shale gas production in Germany would be ordered and that changes in the geological and mining laws are likely to be introduced. The Federal Office for the Natural Environment already on 4 August presented a draft opinion, which looks set to be used as the basis for the announced expert survey and legal changes. The legislative amendments proposed by the office will make shale gas exploration and production in Germany unprofitable, thus putting an end to it. Germany may also take action to restrict the introduction of shale gas production technologies on a large scale in the EU in order to protect the competitiveness of German energy technologies.

Röttgen made this statement in connection with protests from civil organisations against the appraisal of shale gas well drilling and exploration made mainly by the US corporation ExxonMobil in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) and Lower Saxony, which have the largest estimated shale gas deposits in Germany. The protests in NRW intensified the criticism of shale gas exploration in the local parliament. This topic was taken up by Norbert Röttgen, the head of the CDU in NRW, who is also the minister for environmental protection in the federal government. In connection with Röttgen's announcements, the Federal Office for the Natural Environment already on 4 August presented a draft opinion, which is likely to be used as a basis for the expert survey he has promised. The office in its opinion published under the title 'Appraisal of shale gas production in Germany' pointed to the need to check the impact on the natural environment before each drilling; the need to obtain permits for drilling also from offices in charge of water management (in addition to mining offices) which would check the impact of gas production on groundwater and surface water; and a ban on production with the hydraulic fracturing method in areas where potable water, water from medicinal springs or mineral water is extracted. The introduction of these regulations is likely to make shale gas production unprofitable in Germany. Possible changes in legislation would be beneficial from the point of view of the German renewable energy (RES) lobby. This lobby fears the possible production in large shale gas fields in Germany and Poland, which could saturate the electric energy and heat market with shale gas and decrease the share of the developing RES sector. German energy companies are also not interested in shale gas production because they do not have the necessary technologies. Their interests are likely to be still linked to the production and import of conventional natural gas and obtaining returns from the investments they made in large gas projects, such as Nord Stream. <jus, koma>