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Report on the conference

GLOBAL GAS LOCK-IN: LINKING NORTH-SOUTH RESISTANCE

21-23 September 2017 in Brussels, organised by
Corporate Europe Observatory, Counter Balance, Food & Water Europe,
Friends of the Earth Europe, Gastivists Collective, PowerShift e.V. Berlin,
and Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung Brussels

by Noëlie Audi-Dor

WHAT, WHO, WHY

At the end of September 2017, Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung Brussels hosted a three-day conference titled **“Global gas lock-in: linking North-South resistance”**. Over 50 participants – frontline communities, activists, NGOs, academics and decision-makers – gathered to discuss the dangerous impacts of gas, share their experiences and decided on international activities to work on for the year to come.

Video **“Time to Go Beyond Gas”**

This second gas conference reunited many participants from a previous conference (one year earlier) and grew wider. More activists and frontline communities were invited to participate. The diverse backgrounds of the participants – NGOs, academics, decision-makers and activists – brought a wide range of perspectives into the discussion. The geographical diversity of the participants was a key element that enriched the talks: people from South Africa, Nigeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Russia, Ukraine, the USA, Sweden, Portugal, Spain, Brussels, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and many more were able to join.

It was with great regret that some non-EU participants were unable to make it to Brussels, due to visa restrictions. These last-minute changes were met with disappointment and frustration. While refusing the entry of people to Europe is not new, it reminded everyone of the harsh power structures we face and the profound intersectionality of all struggles.

Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung et al. hosted a first conference on gas in 2016 (“Fossil fuel lock-in: why gas is a false solution”). This successful meeting brought together key actors, raised participant’s capacity on the science and legislation behind gas and shed a light on the gaps left to build a movement focusing on gas. A number of campaigns, collectives and projects were started as a result.

The conference was co-organised by Corporate Europe Observatory, Counterbalance, Food & Water Europe, Friends of the Earth Europe, the Gastivists Collective, Powershift e.V. Berlin, and Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung.

The 2017 conference aimed at:

- Building a coalition against further gas infrastructures and LNG imports;
- Organizing along supply chains;
- Learning about the impacts of gas extraction;
- Building a counter-narrative against gas.

Participants were encouraged to shape the conference, and not to only passively listen. Different methodologies were used to make the sessions interactive and allow time in

smaller groups. This was also thought to make the conference a comfortable space to speak for everyone and to build trust and network among all participants.

A key outcome of the conference is the six work streams that were decided as priorities for the year to come:

- Community exchange;
- Speaker's tour;
- Outreach to coal movement, extractivism groups, trade unions;
- Collective action;
- Research;
- Network facilitation.

The details of the content of the conference and its outcomes are explained below.

THE FIRST DAY...

1 Interactive “mapping” of gas campaigns and connections

With participants from around the world, the conference started with an interactive mapping session on getting to know who was in the room and how everyone was connected to each other. Participants literally used the room as a map of the world and placed themselves in it. By using threads of wool, they were then connected to each other. This exercise enabled to visually represent which supply chains were represented in the room, who is working on LNG terminals, who is interested in the finance/market aspects, etc. This session not only showed how people were connected through their interest or location, but also how gas flows across the world and how countries interact.

2 Gas campaigns and struggles

In the first panel discussion of the conference, five participants shared the experiences of their campaigns and local struggles. It highlighted the different impacts of gas (from extraction to transportation) and was a courageous testimony of the resistance of local people. **Laura Weis** (PowerShift e.V., Berlin) facilitated the discussion between **Nnimmo Bassey** (Health of Mother Earth Foundation), **Melissa Haines** (Middletown Coalition for Community Safety), **Roger Domingo** (Support Centre for Land Change), **Jo Ram** (Platform London) and **Xavier Sol** (Counter Balance).

Nnimmo Bassey highlighted the issue of gas flaring in Nigeria and shared information about the Nigeria-Morocco-Spain pipeline. This “new sexy” project, led by Chevron and Shell, is a mega offshore pipeline linking Nigeria up to Morocco along the coast. Nnimmo Bassey explained the situation in the Niger Delta: the criminal actions of oil & gas companies, but also the resistance of fishermen, the importance of linking social classes and slow victories with some parts of the delta being now cleaned up. He finished by highlighting that “there are many struggles around the world, and many different strategies, but we are all fighting for the same target: to keep it in the ground”. (Presentation “Oil and Gas Struggles in Nigeria”)

Melissa Haines, a frontline activist from Philadelphia US, explained the situation she faces in her hometown – where a web of pipelines is being built in between neighbourhoods. The main concern in the town is about safety. She shared, with difficulty, how “my son is starting kindergarten next to a 90-year-old pipeline that has leaked 4 times.” She stressed how the people resisting the pipelines are “normal” people, parents, with a range of political beliefs. They fight for their safety, not out of a specifically environmental concern. But the fight is as tough as the conflicts of interests between the decision-makers and the pipeline company are strong. She warned that this could happen to any town, “It started very normally; they said they would just build a new pipeline and bring money to the community”. The community now faces contaminated water, a devaluation of their property value and the worry of what might come next.

Roger Domingo from South Africa explained that “for us, it is a land issue and we see fracking as a land grab”. He works in Karoo, a region that bases its economy on farming and tourism, and where fracking is expected to go forward. He highlighted issues within the resistance against fracking. When the topic was first discussed in South Africa, many voices stepped up to oppose fracking – but these voices were middle class and not from Karoo, especially not the poor working class from Karoo. The community of Karoo decided to establish an organization to express their own thoughts, to build capacity, participate in consultation, etc. He stressed the importance of making space for the voices of the people directly affected, and the danger of speaking on their behalf. He finished, as he started, “We are land right activists, not environmental activists”.

Jo Ram and Xavier Sol both work on the Southern Gas Corridor, a mega 3500 km pipeline that will bring gas from Azerbaijan to Italy. They started by shedding a light on the situation in Azerbaijan, a dictatorship country that is ripped by scandals of corruption and human rights. Jo Ram highlighted the role of BP, the leading UK oil & gas company, in using this repressive state to extract gas to their benefit. The pipeline must cross six countries before arriving in Italy. Along its route, land grabs are common and resistance is growing in Greece and Italy. In Greece, farmers are facing intimidation from the company but resist in fear of losing their livelihood. In Italy, a diverse and community-led resistance has been strong for years. They are not negotiating for a re-routing, but are fighting against the entire construction of the pipeline. Jo Ram and Xavier Sol reminded us that this gas pipeline is linked to several concerns: local impacts on livelihoods, climate impacts, human right abuses, corruption. The political unanimity in favour of the project comes as no surprise, as the fierce lobby of corporations and the Azerbaijani family are slowly being revealed. Phenomenal loans of up to one billion dollars are being considered by the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) – a key piece to the puzzle that multiple campaigns are trying to prevent.

After the first panel, eight participants held a world café. For 15 minutes, they presented the context and campaigns they were leading on in their country. This was an opportunity for other participants to fully dive into a local context and properly understand the similarities and specificities of different resistances. The different countries presented were: Russia, UK, Spain, Tunisia, Netherlands, Sweden, Nigeria and Morocco.

3 European Union as a driver of the rush for gas worldwide

It followed a panel discussion on the EU’s role in driving gas extraction worldwide. The panel was facilitated by **Antoine Simon** (Friends of the Earth Europe) between **Frida Kieninger** (Food & Water Europe), **Pascoe Sabido** (Corporate Europe Observatory), **Scott Edwards** (Food & Water Watch) and **Alfons Pérez** (Observatory on Debt in Globalisation).

Frida Kieninger presented the narratives of the EU on gas being a “clean fuel”, essential for a transition and to gain independence from Russia. This narrative is justifying an increase in 60% of gas infrastructure, while being in clear incompatibility with the Paris Agreement and EU’s 2050 climate and energy objectives. The list of Projects of Common Interest was also presented as a process enabling public money to finance gas projects. Frida Kieninger

highlighted the research of Friends of the Earth Europe and Food & Water Europe. The report provides a country per country (28 member states) factsheet on gas (supply, demand, and infrastructure). This research brought lots of interest and participants expressed the intention to update and complete it with supply countries. (Presentation “EU policy on gas and the European gas landscape”).

Pascoe Sabido gave a sneak peek into CEO’s latest report **“The Great Gas Lock-in”** on the lobby of the gas industry. He revealed the unsurprising, yet worrying facts: the gas industry spends over 30 times more than civil society on gas, they spent over 100 million euros in 2016 and over 1000 lobbyists are pushing for pro-gas legislation to be adopted. He also explained the link between renewables lobbies and the gas lobbies. Two of the main renewable lobbies have both been taken over by fossil fuel companies. The oil industry wants to delay the uptake of renewables as much as possible, but keeps credibility through marginal investment in renewables. These same companies have the know-how for gas and are thus interested to push for gas as a solution. He pointed to the necessity of speaking more about the specific actors in our discussions on gas as these actors represent often a clear link between the different struggles. (Presentation “Fire Power of the Gas Lobby”).

Scott Edwards reminded how the love for fossil fuels in the US is much older than Trump and is not a partisan issue. The US is entering a period where it is becoming a gas exporter. While a gas peak is expected in 2020, there are projects to keep exporting large amounts of gas in the long term. The Trump administration comes with a reduced accountability and a stop to all methane reporting by the gas industry. Many new bills proposed in 2017 aimed at facilitating the extraction and exportation of fossil fuels, with the justification of creating more jobs. Scott Edwards also explained how companies are increasingly using legal loops to overtake property rights. The use of “eminent domain”, which is originally for the public good of citizens, is now being used by companies wanting to profit from gas exports to dispossess land owners. Scott ended on a positive note, highlighting the big push from grassroots groups in US on renewables. (Presentation “United States LNG export policy and trends”).

Alfons Pérez presented how LNG terminals, being more flexible and market driven than pipelines, are coherent with the EU’s narrative of diversification. While pipelines can only provide 1 to 1 exchanges, LNG terminals give access to gas supply from all the countries with export terminals around the world. The fact that only 20% of the capacity of existing terminals was used in 2015 does not seem to put a break on EU’s enthusiasm for LNG. This push for worldwide gas to be supplied has consequences. He indicated how “gas is not simply produced, but is extracted”. This extraction comes with a rise in energy prices for local population, elites capturing business, communities impoverished and environmental impacts. It is important that we use the correct words and explain how the EU plays a role in these local impacts. He ended by stressing how the EU’s push is tempting many new countries to join the gas market and become exporters, risking expensive investments to build gas exporting infrastructure and with direct consequences on the local population. (Presentation “LNG or pipeline global supply chains, gas markets and prices”).

The day ended on participants going into breakout groups to discuss the elements of the panel discussion in more detail and have time to ask their specific questions.

THE SECOND DAY...

4 Gas narratives

The morning of the second day focused on 'narratives', or how gas is being presented to the world. In the plenary, participants went first through adverts of the gas industry, looking at their messaging, and their hooks. They then went into breakout groups to focus on the specific angles they were interested in, before feeding back in plenary:

1) The jargon around gas: The group proposed to use "fossil" gas when in doubt. They highlighted the need to have a glossary of definitions of the different types of gas (biogas, renewable gas, etc.).

2) How to counter the industry's narrative: The group highlighted the necessity to better define who we are addressing (consumers, workers, etc.) and to shift the question from "should we invest in gas instead of coal" to "should we invest in renewables instead of gas".

3) The intersectionality of gas: The group explained how many frontline communities do not use the climate angle to talk about gas, but are concerned about safety (earthquakes, water contamination), livelihoods (agriculture, tourism), democracy, corruption, land rights, etc. Gas is more than a "climate issue" and it should be reflected in the way it is talked about.

4) Using direct action as a tool to shift narrative: The group showed how non-violent direct action could be used to complement political/policy work.

5) Formulating complaints against the industry's misleading adverts: The group learnt how to fill in an official complaint against the gas industry's adverts when incorrect facts are used.

6) Connecting with the coal movement: The links between the anti-coal and anti-gas movement and work were explored and considered essential.

5 Working along gas supply chains

The afternoon started with a panel discussion on the complexity of effectively working along a supply chain. **Frida Kieninger** (Food & Water Europe) facilitated the discussion between **Ike Teuling** (Milieudefensie) and **Nnimmo Bassey** (Health of Mother Earth Foundation) on the court case against Shell in Nigeria, **Laure Kervyn** (Friends of the Earth Europe) on the Standing Rock speaker's tour, **Regine Richter** (Urgewald) on the challenges of working along the Southern Gas Corridor and **Aleksandra Koroleva** (Ecodefense) on European-Russian work.

Ike Teuling and Nnimmo Bassey presented the work that the Netherlands and Nigeria have done jointly in response to Shell's actions in Nigeria. Nnimmo Bassey highlighted how local action alone cannot overturn the powers of big corporations to commit crimes against people. He explained how solidarity work is an essential element in these fights because companies care about what their shareholders say. When Shell is talked about in the Netherlands, it carries a weight that they cannot ignore. Ike Teuling pointed out to the Shellwatch website, which shows and compares what Shell says and what it is actually doing on the ground. She also stressed the extent to which big companies, such as Shell, invest in maintaining a positive image in their headquarter country.

Regine Richter explained the difficulty of working on mega projects, such as the Southern Gas Corridor. She highlighted the need for cooperation between different types of NGOs - finance, lobby, climate, human rights - on the work of the Southern Gas Corridor due to its intersectional nature. As the pipeline crosses several countries, there is a necessity to understand in depth the political context in all the producing and transit countries to have a real overview of the issues. She also touched upon the complexity of working in difficult political contexts: while repression is an obvious challenge in the campaign, it has also been used to pressure companies and governments to step out of the pipeline through reputational risks.

Laure Kervyn shared her experience of the Stand Up with "Standing Rock speakers' tour". During one month, four indigenous activists of the Dakota Access Pipeline participated in a range of activities in Europe: direct actions in banks, interviews, conferences, gatherings with NGOs/activists and concerts. With two of the activists being hip-hop artists, they use their art to talk to people. Since the tour, the links that have been created have remained strong. There has been a call-out for a global day of action in which the groups who had welcomed the indigenous activists participated. A hip-hop tour is being organised in Europe and some European activists have been invited to a Healing Ceremony in the USA. The tour also allowed making links between struggles. The Standing Rock activists for example discovered about the TAP pipeline (Trans Adriatic Pipeline), reinforcing their belief and narrative that we are fighting a common system, not individual projects.

Aleksandra Koroleva kindly joined the panel to give an insight on the eastern bloc. She wanted to remind us two essential elements: the EU wants Russian gas, and Russia wants to sell its gas. Nord Stream II is a perfect illustration of this. She highlighted the extent to which the Russian regime is dependent on its natural resources, including oil and gas. If the rest of the world transits to renewables, the economy of Russia will fail, as well as its regime. The regime thus puts all the effort it can into maintaining fossil fuels, even if it must violate its own legislation to advance fossil projects. She explained how, for many Russians, the only option they have to heat their homes is coal. They see gas as an unreachable dream, a clean and amazing resource. She finished by reminding how difficult it was from Russian NGOs to be doing effective work due to the legal constraints they face. She encouraged having a better flow of information and more translations from Russian to English.

After the panel, groups broke out along specific supply chains (Nigeria-Morocco pipeline, Nord Stream II, transatlantic supply chain US-Europe) or around a specific interest (finance/market, fracked gas, COP23). The groups were asked to each define “3 questions, 3 activities and 3 actors” on their subject to enable the discussion. This was an opportunity to take time to better get to know people working on similar areas and begin coordinated work. Out of this, a Trans-Atlantic working group was started and plans for COP23 were sketched out.

6 Turning points for a long-term perspective

The second day finished with a focus on the long-term perspective: what is the end goal that participants are aiming to reach? In the plenary, the Gastivists collective lead a short meditation on the long-term future, inviting participants to reflect on what system they would like to be living in. After the meditation, the breakout groups discussed the question what were the turning points that would enable them to reach this future.

They came up with key turning points: alliances (broad, at the right time, strategic); developing a joint vision; highlighting the broader issues (colonialism, economic system) and linking struggles; communicate the concept of gas bubble, link it back to financial crisis and redefine what level of profit is acceptable; shift individual actions to collective system change actions; spreading knowledge; an environmental/gas catastrophe.

These were kept in mind for the session of the following day on strategic activities.

THE THIRD DAY...

7 Developing strategies & planning common activities

The last day of the 2017 conference focused entirely on developing common activities, as part of a wider strategy to fight gas. In small groups, participants defined four main activities they believed the gas movement should focus on for the year to come. In the plenary, once the activities were presented, everyone indicated what they considered essential and where they could put time and capacity in. After an intense but productive discussion, a set of six activities to focus on were chosen: Community exchange, Speakers' tour, Outreach, Collective action, Research, Network facilitation (more about the six activities in the following section). During the afternoon, small groups discussed these specific activities and decided on next steps. The small groups then gave feedback in plenary where other participants could express their interest to join a working group. The day ended with a short evaluation and a genuine thank you for all the participants and organisers!

OUTCOMES OF THE CONFERENCE

Participants defined activities they believed the gas movement should focus on for the year to come. A set of six activities were chosen: Community exchange, Speakers' tour, Outreach, Collective action, Research, Network facilitation.

1 Community exchange

Having a person from a community explain the risks and challenges of gas is much more powerful than bringing in "experts" or "NGO workers" from outside. Communities experience different concerns and develop different strategies than NGOs. This work stream aims to facilitate frontline communities to meet each other, as they work on the same "level". This would be organized bilaterally or regionally through community exchanges and/or specific frontline community gatherings. These spaces would allow communities to share their experience, their struggles and learn from one another. The working group agreed on trying to take forward an exchange between African countries and an exchange within the UK. An international frontline meeting was also proposed and could potentially be included in a following gas conference. The necessity to have one organization or person appointed to work on this project was highlighted. The working group's first step is to set up a global list of organisations working on these issues.

2 Speakers' tour

The necessity to adapt the concept of a classic speakers' tour was highlighted. According to different countries and contexts, needs would vary and a single common activity would not always be relevant. A tour to promote a specific call-out or multiple events under the same period/umbrella, were considered as good options. The variety of formats was also presented as opportunities to explore: live storytelling, recorded videos from multiple frontline communities, a video countering the pro-gas narrative, etc. could all be used as tools along the tour.

3 Outreach

The necessity to reach out to certain groups and movements was highlighted. But reaching out to whom exactly? And why? Three main target audiences were defined as priorities:

The anti-coal movement: The desire to further work with anti-coal organisations was shared. An initial goal is to broaden the understanding of gas and how it fits in a coal phase-out. A wealth of resources (on methane leaks, lock-in effects, impacts on communities etc.) is available, but still needs to be put into clear and understandable factsheets, potentially from a coal perspective. The first task of this work stream is to map the groups working on coal and their position on gas. Several organisations work on coal *and* gas, which would be key actors to contact. There was a common agreement that there is a lot to learn from the successes and mistakes of the anti-coal movement.

Extractivism groups: The inherent elements of environmental racism and neo-colonialism that are rooted in gas extraction and consumption were discussed. It was however stressed

that in each country/region, the context varied. The first step is to better understand these links and map what groups already work on this issue to learn from them (for example, the many South American environmental groups working within this frame). It was also encouraged to deepen existing links with the groups present at the conference who already work on extractivism.

Trade unions: Trade unions were seen as an essential actor to develop genuine relationships with from the start. There is a need to raise awareness in gas groups about the demands of fossil fuel workers, as well as explain our concerns about gas to fossil fuel workers. An international manifesto with common and overlapping demands between fossil fuel workers and gas NGOs was stressed as the direction towards which we should aim to go. The importance to highlight positive stories and examples of joint struggles was stressed.

4 Collective action

There was a strong enthusiasm to organise a collective action (day or period) in September 2018. It was decided to use the following months, being involved in international discussions and processes, to better assess the feasibility of the project. A final decision on whether to take the idea forward and to set its exact frame will be taken in January 2018. The working group defined that the call-out would be rooted in demands of justice and would be led by grassroots organisers.

5 Research

Friends of the Earth Europe and Food & Water Europe have jointly produced an in-depth research of the 28 European member states and their situation on gas (demand, supply, and infrastructure). The work stream aims to keep feeding into this research and add information on missing countries (especially gas supply countries). Other elements of research, such as the links to renewables and a compilation of the scientific climate impacts of gas, were proposed.

6 Network facilitation

The last work stream is dedicated to network facilitation. In other words: ensuring that the people participating in the conference keep in touch and continue working together. The group proposed to have bi-monthly calls dedicated to the coordination of the different work streams and sharing updates from specific struggles/campaigns. A platform to share information and gather existing resources was also seen as a useful tool. The hope to have a third Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung Gas Conference in 2018 was expressed.

NEXT STEPS

While the conference only finished two months ago, groups are already taking forward the work and connections they made. The work streams are in the process of being formally set up online and are taken forward at their own pace. The first coordination call was held at the end of October 2017, giving an overview on the work streams and an update on the TAP struggle. The next call will be in December 2017.

To join the bi-monthly calls or a specific work stream, email hello@gastivsts.org. To join the “beyond-gas” email list that was set up after the 2016 gas conference, email fkieninger@fweurope.org or marlis.gensler@rosalux.org.

Several groups attended the UN Climate Change Conference (COP23) in Bonn and organized workshops, events and actions on gas. The Gastivists collective invited to a strategy meeting in Bonn to discuss the workstreams with new groups, as well as the ones who participated in the conference. For further details, email noelie@gastivsts.org.

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Website with presentations:

<http://www.rosalux.eu/eventdetail/event/global-gas-lock-in-linking-north-south-resistance/>

PROGRAMME

The first day

Overview:

- 1) Interactive “mapping” of gas campaigns and connections;
- 2) Gas campaigns and struggles (panel & world café);
- 3) EU driver of gas worldwide (panel & breakout groups);

Objectives:

Understanding who is in the room, the different contexts and challenges faced; explore the multiple angles used to frame gas and the wider geopolitical picture.

The second day

Overview:

- 4) Session Gas narratives;
- 5) Working along supply chains (panel & breakout groups);
- 6) Session Long-term goals;

Objectives:

Working on the narratives used to promote gas and the tools to counter them; unpack the complexities of working along supply chains; reflection on the long-term future we wish to achieve.

The third day

Overview:

- 7) Strategy session; defining workstreams (plenary and breakout groups); Evaluation and closing.

Objectives:

Developing a range of activities that we wish to prioritise for 2018.

