



**Friends of  
the Earth  
Europe**

for the people | for the planet | for the future



## **Threats to Human Rights Defenders in Pungești, Romania**

**Field visit report on the struggle of local  
populations affected by the development by  
Chevron of new shale gas projects without  
their consent.**

**[6 to 9 December 2013]**



**Friends of  
the Earth  
Europe**

Rue d'Edimbourg 26 • 1050 Brussels  
Belgium  
T: +32 (0)2 893 10 00 • F: +32 (0)2 893 10 35  
info@foeeurope.org • www.foeeurope.org

Huguine Simon





## Table of Contents

<b>3</b>	Introduction
<b>4</b>	Testimonies
<b>15</b>	Letter to Martin Schulz from Friends of the Earth Europe
<b>16</b>	Account of the visit to Pungesti

**Prepared by David Heller and Antoine Simon |  
December 2013**

*Friends of the Earth Europe gratefully acknowledges financial assistance from the Isvara Foundation and DG Environment. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of Friends of the Earth Europe and cannot be regarded as reflecting the position of the funder(s) mentioned above. The funder(s) cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information this document contains.*



## Threats to Human Rights Defenders in Pungești, Romania

*Friends of the Earth Europe field visit in Pungești, Romanian, to witness the human rights violations observed during shale gas developments.*

### Introduction

The community of Pungești, in Vaslui county, Romania, is currently engaged in a struggle to defend their water and land from plans for the development of shale gas reserves in their village for which they have never been consulted. Over the past 2 months, several members of the community have faced repression including: arbitrary arrests and fines, beatings and threats of violence at the hands of Romanian riot police (*Jandarmeria*). Threats have also been made against community organisers who have come to support the local struggle.

A number of the "Human Rights Defenders" that were met in Pungești (Mariana Morosanu, Bogdan Palici, Constantin Spiridon), as well as Father Laiu from the nearby town of Barlad, feel that they may be at imminent risk of further police brutality and persecution as a result of their activities in leading or supporting the struggle against unconventional shale gas development.

A more general description of the visit can be found at the end of the document, as well as a letter sent by FoEE and other groups and individuals to the President of the European Parliament on 6<sup>th</sup> December. An online petition, hosted by Avaaz.org, and signed by 45,000 people in two weeks can be found online at: <http://bit.ly/19E8XkV>.

This document is based on a visit made by Antoine Simon and David Heller (both from Friends of the Earth Europe) to the region on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> December 2013. It gathers testimonies received during the visit by different types of local actors: People involved in the resistance and people not involved, youngsters and elderly, farmers, political and religious actors. Video testimonies from those interviewed (in Romanian), as well as further background on the case, can be provided on request.

#### Timeline:

- **October 14<sup>th</sup>:** Start of protests in Pungești in response to arrival of Chevron equipment. Establishment of protest camp
- **October 16<sup>th</sup>:** Protest in Pungești, leading to Chevron temporarily abandoning work at drilling site
- **December 2<sup>nd</sup>:** Violent eviction of protest camp with mass arrests. Chevron starts work at drilling site. Unclear who gave orders for intervention.
- **December 8<sup>th</sup>:** Protest in Pungești. Police enter private property for second eviction of protest camp. Declaration of "area of special public protection" by authorities, used as pretext for escalation of police presence in village.

#### Contact information:

Antoine Simon (in Brussels): [antoine.simon@foeeurope.org](mailto:antoine.simon@foeeurope.org), mobile phone: +32 (0)486685664  
David Heller (in Brussels): [david.heller@foeeurope.org](mailto:david.heller@foeeurope.org), mobile phone: +32 (0)472342463



## Testimonies

### Mariana Morosanu



Mariana Morosanu is a local resident, and daughter of former mayor Constantin Spriridon. She has played an active role in organising the local community resistance, to defend the land and water from what she sees as an illegal land grab by Chevron. Mariana is seen as a ringleader by police, and is being targeted as an instigator of the protests. As a result of this, she has been arrested and fined 3 times, twice 500 lei (around 125euro or one month salary) and once 200 lei (50euro). On one occasion police claimed that this was due to trespass on Chevron property, although the police lied, she was on the other side of the road. She has been treated badly when arrested, including being carried and physically hurt when she had said she would go peacefully, and also being verbally insulted by police.

Police have threatened her with 2 years in prison, and she is concerned about this threat to her liberty. She has filed a legal complaint against the police, and although lawyers are currently working for free, support with legal expenses would be welcome.



**Constantin Spiridon**



Constantin Spiridon is 57 years old and was mayor of Pungesti for 8 years from 1996. He lives and works as a farmer on the hill overlooking the drilling site.

He was arrested and hospitalised on 16<sup>th</sup> October, during one of the first "human chain" protests organised by local residents. He was pushed into a small ditch by police, and hit in the chest. The blow knocked him unconscious, and there were rumour circulating that he had died. He is suing the police as a result of this incident.

On Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> December, he was in his car in a village near the protest camp. He was dragged from the car and police broke 2 of his ribs. He has a hospital certificate for this. He feels that he was targeted by police as known person, who has been vocal in the case.

He is concerned about loss of land of poor peasant farmers, especially after a law comes into force next year to allow foreign land ownership. He has made an official complaint about corruption in transfer of land to current mayor of Pungesti.



**Bogdan Palici**



Bogdan is 28 years old, and works as a film maker and photographer for NGO “Association VIRA”. He grew up in the town of Barlad, near to Pungesti. Together with colleagues from VIRA he was amongst one of the first people to begin raising awareness of the threat of shale gas drilling in Pungesti. His approach has been community education and organising with the local community, and he has travelled regularly to the area over the past 2 years. The work of Bogdan and colleagues has been vital to raise awareness and to support the community.

During the last visit to Pungesti on 8<sup>th</sup> December, Bogdan was verbally threatened by a senior police officer who said that his face was becoming “too familiar” in the area, and suggesting that he should not be seen there again. The police officer ended by saying “I will remember you, I will remember you.”



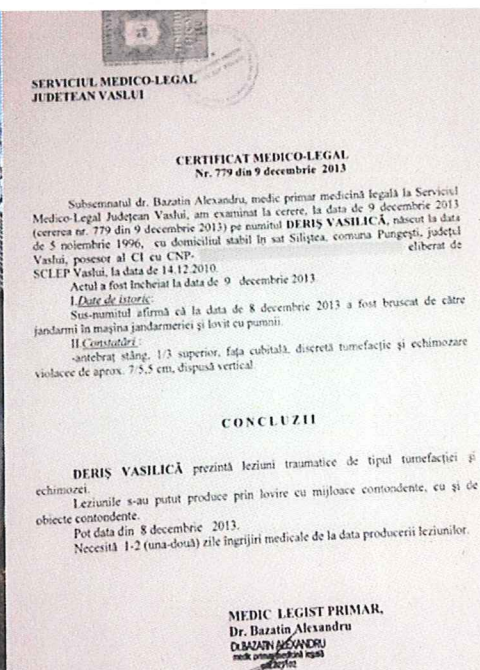
## Father Laiu



Father Laiu is an Orthodox priest in Barlad, near to Pungesti. He has been one of the most vocal opponents of shale gas developments in the region, and has travelled to Brussels to present the case against the development. He feels that he is currently at risk from police, who have identified him as one of the leaders of the movement in Barlad.



## Deris Vasilica



Deris Vasilica is 17 years old (a minor in Romania), and works on his family farm. On the morning of 8<sup>th</sup> December, he was taking his the cows to pasture. He was arrested by riot police and taken brutally into their van and beaten. He was held for half an hour, and then released with a 50lei (12 euro) fine. The reason given by the police for his arrest is that he refused to give his identity, although he gave the police his name when he was asked. A copy of the "Process Verbal" is available on request.

The riot police deployed in the area are currently being hosted in the boarding school where Deris usually stays, and he was threatened by one of the police that they would "see him there". According to the medical certificate, doctors found "traumatic swelling and bruising types. Lesions have been produced by means of blunt impact with blunt objects ". Deris is now determined to sue the gendarmes who arrested, fined and hit him for no reason, especially as he didn't participate to protests.

<http://www.vrn.ro/elev-batut-de-jandarmi-la-pungesti>



## Dediu Mihai



Dediu Mihai is 17 years old (a minor in Romania). He lives and works on his family farm in Pungesti. He had joined the protests by local residents, in order to protect his land and water supply. When police raided the protest camp on the early morning of 2nd December, he was at home, but was called to the camp by a cousin.

During the police operation to forcefully evict the camp he was hit by riot police on the left leg. The police made a warning to leave the camp, but only after their intervention. While running to try to escape the police, putting extra weight on his right leg, he twisted and broke his right leg. He was visited in the hospital by the police who took his declaration.



**Costel Várnacea**



Costel Várnacea lives in Pungesti.

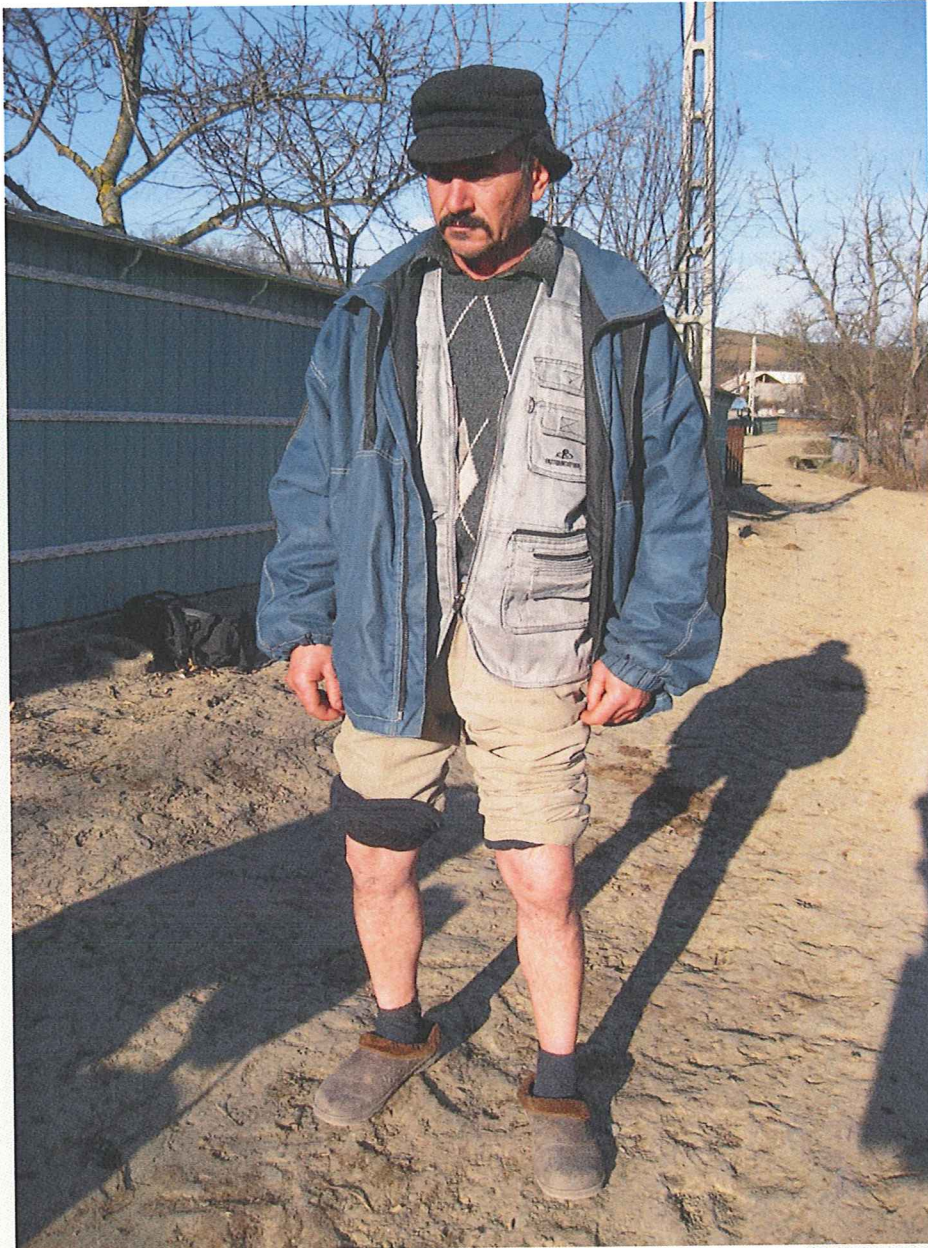
He arrived on December 8<sup>th</sup> at the Vaslui County Hospital with a head injury and a broken arm.

He recounted that he went on the main road of Pungesti with some neighbours at around 18:30 but were arrested without any reason by a patrol of gendarmes. He said he was threatened by gendarmes of being shot. "I fell down and I was hit in the head with one policeman's boot. They beat me and I was left there unconscious. I crawled up to a neighbour and then I got to the hospital".

<http://www.vrn.ro/batut-de-jandarmi-si-lasat-%E2%80%99Clat%E2%80%99D-pe-drum>



## Vajan Costica

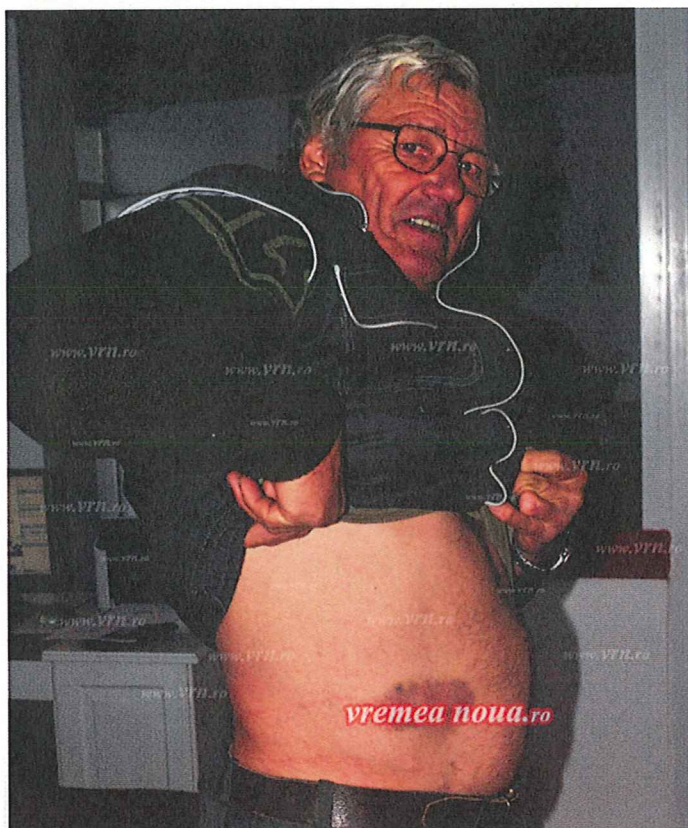


Vajan Costica is 47 years old, and lives in Pungesti.

He lives nearby the protest camp, and was staying in the camp during the day. When riot police evicted the camp on 2<sup>nd</sup> December, he was hit on the back of the head and riot police pushed him to the ground, injuring his knee. His right knee remains swollen and bruised as a result 1 week later.



## Ion Gâză



Cabinet medical / Spital: .....  
 Medic: .....

**SCRISOARE MEDICALĂ**

Doamnei / Domnului Dr. *Gile Lou* .....

Cabinet medical: *Pungesti* .....

Stimată (e) Colegă (Coleg),  
 vă informăm că pacientul (a) dumneavoastră

Nume *Sîze* ..... Prenume *Lou* .....  
 CNP .....  
 născut la data de ..... vârstă *67* ani, sexul .....  
 cu domiciliul în (județul) *Silistea* (localitatea) *Silistea* .....  
 a fost consultat (ă) în serviciul nostru la data de *10.XII* .....

Diagnosticul: *Leziune abdominală în regiunea hipocostică dreaptă - posibil de 4 zile -  
 Leziune de 4 cm în 6.7.10  
 Ulcer de cronic* .....

Tratament recomandat: *Seltriat 400 mg - 150g  
 1 la 2 zile  
 Tropece 400 mg - 3 x 3 x  
 1 la 2 zile  
 H2O 1-2 litri  
 Ceai 1-2 litri* .....

Data *10.XII/2012* ..... Semnătura și peceta medicului .....

Ion Gâză is 67 years old and lives in Silistea, a village close to Pungesti.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of December, he was at the local store in Silistea, together with other inhabitants from the area and journalists, when the riot police came up violently, in order to disperse a group of protesters that were standing in the street, right in front of the store. While one local inhabitant was being brutally arrested, Mr Gâză came out of the store to question the policemen. One of them grabbed his neck, put him down to the ground and hit him in the liver, leaving me down facing the ground.

Four days after he was beaten he went to the County Emergency Hospital in Vaslui, since he had pains and kept vomiting. There the doctors found that bruises in the liver area, in the right hypochondrium that was four days old.

Mr. Ion Gâză said that he saw the doctor that late because "the riot police monitor everybody walking in the street every day, to see where they go, what they do, whom they meet and after 7 p.m. they do not allow anybody to go out in the street! [...] We are constantly afraid that they might break in into our houses or arrest us in the street for going to the bread store!"

<http://www.vrn.ro/nicio-zi-fara-un-pungestean-batut-de-jandarmi>



## Willy Schuster



Willy Schuster is a famous German organic farmer based in Mosna, a rural village located in the center of Romania, where he is experiencing abuse from shale gas seekers. His concerns started recently after representatives of shale gas companies have entered his private fields, placed several seismic wells and used explosives without his consent. Willy Schuster removed from his property the sensors and cut their cables. He is now sued with criminal charges for destruction and is threatened by local authorities. Concerned by the situation in the country, he came with his minor daughter on Sunday 15th December in Bucharest to take part to a peaceful protest.

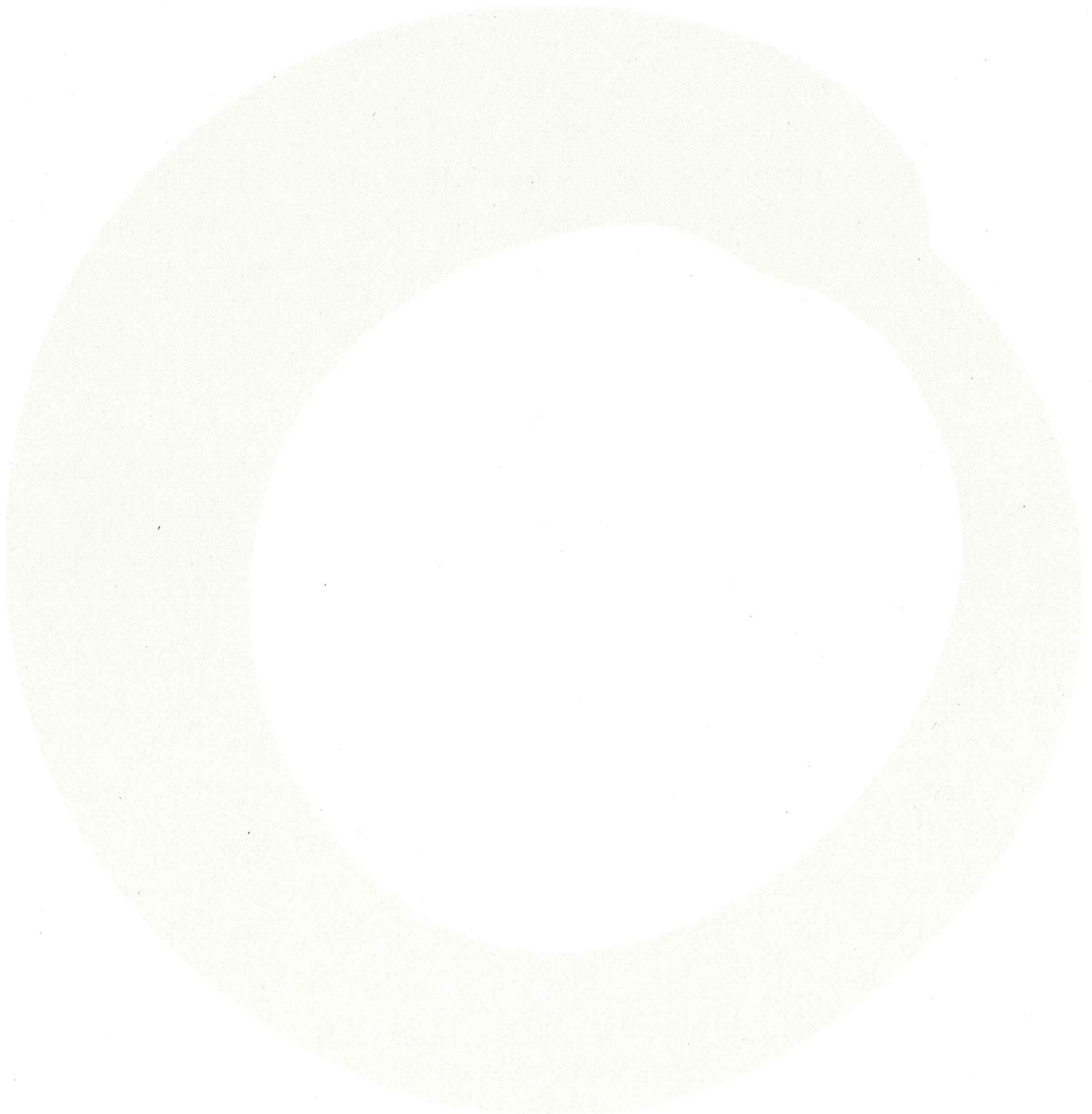
While he was discussing with a negotiator, around fifteen riot policemen brutally arrested and insulted him: *“While they were hitting me, I lifted my hands up so they could see I had no violent intentions, but they continued to hit me. They wanted to force me into a bus but I kept insisting I was here with a minor. They pushed me in anyway and continued to beat me like a one would hit a punching bag.[...] They broke my head, I have three stitches, and also got a MRI scan due to multiple hits on the head with fists, batons and boots. I also got a CT scan at the stomach, because they punched me in the belly as well. They also broke two of my fingers”*.

<http://trezirealarealitate.ro/2013/12/marturia-lui-willy-schuster-protestatarul-batut-de-jandarmi-in-bucuresti-jandarmii-au-fost-foarte-agresivi/#>



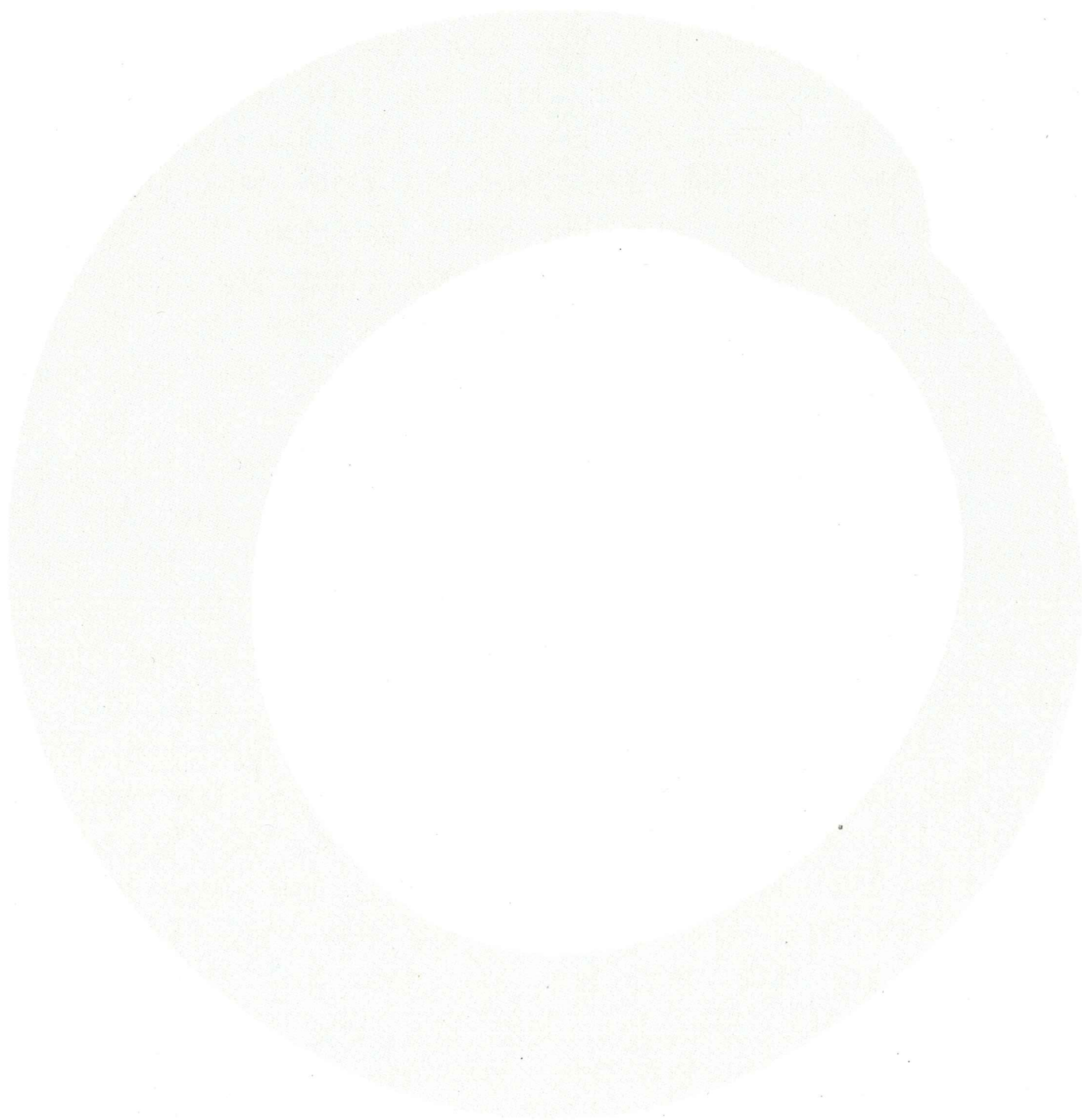
**Other cases**

<https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B1Nj96pMF1hWY2pRTy15X2FhSDQ/edit?pli=1>





## Corruption case in Pungesti





## Letter to Martin Schulz from Friends of the Earth Europe

Dear President Schulz,

I am writing to you concerning the breach of European Union basic principles and regulations that started in Romania with events which took place on 2nd December 2013 in Pungesti, Romania - site of citizens' protest against shale gas exploration.

The right to private property has been desecrated when a group of around 100 local residents peacefully protesting in a camp, on private property, near to the land which Chevron wish to drill on, were forcibly removed by riot police troops in battle gear.

Riot police trespassed on private property, which citizens had permission by the land-owner to be camping upon, and was not the land of Chevron's explorations.

The right to physical integrity and rule of law have been breached when public forces were used to exercise a disproportionate amount of force on citizens and brutal physical abuse was brought upon European citizens in order to remove them from the camp.

Contrary to the free movement principle that stays at the basis of the European Union, at the request of the Romanian Government representatives a lock-down of an entire locality has been enforced. A restricted area has been established entirely arbitrarily and spanning a large surface area. The press has been banned from entering, as well as villagers, however private contractors are allowed free passage.

Moreover, the press was finally allowed access under supervision and only for a very limited period, effectively impeding on their ability to report from the area and collect testimonies from the people involved, thus infringing on the freedom of expression and right to be informed.

These are clear breaches of the rights granted to EU citizens through the European charter and a questionable rule of law. Therefore we call on you to publicly condemn the actions of the Romanian Government in ordering such brutal and authoritarian action against its own citizens, to facilitate the launch of a full investigation by the European Commission, and to act for prevention of future abuses and the establishment of rule of law in Romania.

Yours sincerely,

Magda Stoczkiewicz  
Director, Friends of the Earth Europe



## Account of the visit to Pungești

Published online at: <http://www.foeeurope.org/Solidarity-with-Punge%C5%9Fti-071213>

*Antoine Simon and David Heller from Friends of the Earth Europe, travelled to the village of Pungești in Romania this weekend to observe and document the village's resistance to shale gas. The community's stand against Chevron has become one of the front lines of the struggle against dirty energy in Europe.*

Arriving in the village of Pungești, about four hours north of Bucharest in the east of Romania, the first thing we experienced was a police road block. The police checked the papers of our driver and allowed us to continue. We found out later that we were the last car allowed to enter the village. Other people arriving from across Romania were held at the checkpoint for several hours. The sight of police exercising their power in an arbitrary way was to become very familiar over the coming 24 hours.

We travelled to Pungești to show our solidarity with the struggle against the start of Chevron's shale gas drilling in the village. There is widespread, and well founded, concern that the drilling (potentially using fracking) will pollute the ground water on which the overwhelmingly rural community – unconnected to mains water supply – depends for their daily use in drinking and cooking, sanitation and farming.

A peaceful demonstration from the villagers in mid-October physically blocked Chevron's first attempt to move into the area. This forced the giant American oil and gas company to suspend work for several weeks, and acknowledge the need to ensure public backing for the scheme. A camp was established by the villagers opposed to shale gas in order to protect the proposed drilling site. It has become a base for the resistance to Chevron in the village. However, no attempt was made by Chevron to engage in debate or negotiations with the local community. At the start of December, riot police violently evicted the camp and Chevron was able to begin work on the site.

As we got closer to the protest, it soon became clear that Chevron has totally failed to win the support of the local community. A crowd of several hundred had gathered, and some people were beginning to dismantle the newly erected fence around the drilling site. This action was a clear sign that the community and their supporters were willing to take the only action available to them in order to remove the threat to their lives and livelihoods.

Opposite the drilling site, we held flags and banners, singing and chanting, braving the cold wind. We stood shoulder to shoulder with people of all ages who had come to join the protests. One person who had given up his job in Bucharest to join the protest camp told us, "*When I'm older and my children ask me 'What did you do when Chevron arrived in Romania?' I don't want to tell them that I did nothing to protect the water and the land.*"

It is easy to understand why this sentiment is widespread amongst a community and a movement that feel betrayed by elected officials which have consistently refused to listen to them. The local mayor has allowed Chevron to drill on land he acquired in a questionable manner. He has not been welcome in the village since the start of the protests. The prefecture (representative of the national government in the county) has twice prevented a local referendum on the topic. At national level, the prime minister was elected in 2012 with a pledge to oppose fracking and the plans for the widely



opposed Rosia Montana gold mine, but has made a massive political u-turn and has now become an enthusiastic supporter of both plans.

The most obvious symbol of the conflict with the authorities is the presence of the riot police (Jendarmeria) who have been sent into the region as a kind of occupying army. It was these forces who entered the private property where we were stood and arrested people, often violently, and seemingly at random. Many people were chased across the hills by lines of riot police with their shields and batons. Those of us who remained were surrounded in the protest camp by police. There were more violent arrests.

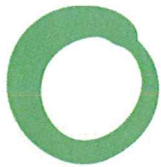
Back in the village, we gathered in the local shop, which also did service as a bar. The evening news reported that Chevron had made an announcement that it had once more temporarily suspended the works in the village. A little while later, riot police entered the shop and ordered the owner to close. People who had left the bar by the back door were arrested, and dragged violently by police to their van.

As we stood outside the bar in the cold, we were very thankful to the villagers who provided accommodation for the night for those who had travelled to support the protests. We were offered a very warm – physically and figuratively – welcome in a nearby farm. The farmer explained that the feeling of community in the village has increased in the past few weeks, as people unite to oppose their common enemy.

The following day, we awoke to news that Chevron had resumed drilling. The temporary halt to work had lasted from sunset to sunrise. The village felt like it was under siege. As we walked along the main road there were riot police stationed every few metres, perhaps as many police as houses. Everywhere we went we met villagers who had been beaten and arrested during two months of harassment by the authorities. One boy had been arrested beaten and fined by police that morning while he was simply taking his cows to pasture.

The village is determined to continue resisting, and the surrounding villages are also starting to prepare for the arrival of Chevron on their land. It seems unlikely that Chevron will ever gain support from the local population for its plans to extract the gas from under their feet and leave little behind except pollution.





**Friends of  
the Earth  
Europe**

**for the people | for the planet | for the future**

## **Friends of the Earth Europe**

### **Member Groups**

Austria	Global 2000
Belgium (Wallonia & Brussels)	Les Amis de la Terre
Belgium (Flanders & Brussels)	Friends of the Earth
Bulgaria	Za Zemiata
Croatia	Zelena Akcija
Cyprus	Friends of the Earth
Czech Republic	Hnutí Duha
Denmark	NOAH
England, Wales & Northern Ireland	Friends of the Earth
Estonia	Eesti Roheline Liikumine
Finland	Maan Ystävät Ry
France	Les Amis de la Terre
Georgia	Sakharvelos Mtsvaneta Modzraoba
Germany	Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland (BUND)
Hungary	Magyar Természetvédők Szövetsége
Ireland	Friends of the Earth
Italy	Amici della Terra
Latvia	Latvijas Zemes Draugi
Lithuania	Lietuvos Zaliuju Judėjimas
Luxembourg	Mouvement Ecologique
Macedonia	Dvizhenje na Ekologistite na Makedonija
Malta	Friends of the Earth Malta
The Netherlands	Milieudefensie
Norway	Norges Naturvernforbund
Poland	Polski Klub Ekologiczny
Scotland	Friends of the Earth Scotland
Slovakia	Priatel'ia Zeme
Spain	Amigos de la Tierra
Sweden	Jordens Vänner
Switzerland	Pro Natura
Ukraine	Zelenyi Svit

**Friends of the Earth Europe** campaigns for sustainable and just societies and for the protection of the environment, unites more than 30 national organisations with thousands of local groups and is part of the world's largest grassroots environmental network, Friends of the Earth International.