

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0766/03  
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to the Council

Subject:           Exploitation of natural resources in Western Sahara

The administration of Western Sahara by the Moroccan Government has been disputed ever since Spain left in 1975.

Despite the various political agreements established at UN level for decolonising the territory, it is public knowledge that in October 2001, the Moroccan Government granted licences to two international companies, one French and the other American, to test drill for energy resources in the territorial waters of the Western Sahara. These companies entrusted the Norwegian company TGS-NOPEC with making the preliminary seismic investigations.

In view of the UN Security Council Legal Services' report of 29 January 2002, the licences granted by the Moroccan government could be understood as infringing international law, which means that should such energy resources be exploited, they would belong to the Saharan people.

Public opinion in Norway has recently denounced TGS-NOPEC on the grounds that its activities in the waters of Western Sahara infringe international law with regard to prospecting for and possibly exploiting the natural resources of a non-autonomous territory pending its decolonisation.

Given the Lalumière Report by the European Parliament on the situation in Western Sahara, and the circumstances surrounding this long-standing dispute and the presence of a Community undertaking in this prospecting for energy resources and their subsequent exploitation, what position does the Council take with regard to the current situation of test drilling and possible exploitation?