



France will maintain a ban on fracking until there is proof that shale gas exploration won't harm the environment or "massacre" the landscape, President Nicolas Sarkozy said.

"Development of hydrocarbon resources underground is strategic for our country but not at any price," Sarkozy said during a visit to Ales in southern France. "This won't be done until it has been shown that technologies used for development respect the environment, the complex nature of soil and water networks."

The French government plans to revoke shale permits, including one held by Total SA, because of concerns over the environmental repercussions of hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, which was made illegal in July. This process, widely used in North America, involves pumping water and chemicals into rock to release gas.

The government is in the process of canceling the Montelimar permit held by Total and the Nant and Villeneuve-de-Berg licenses granted to Schuepbach Energy LLC, according to a statement yesterday from the environment and industry ministries. Lawmakers voted to make fracking illegal last June, making France the first country in the world with such a ban.

Development of shale gas reserves in these regions could come "at the price of fragmenting the soil that would massacre the almost spiritual scenery" of the Causses and Cevennes mountain landscape, which was added as a UNESCO's world heritage site in June, Sarkozy said today.

Ales, where Sarkozy made his speech, is at the foot of the Cevennes mountains in the Gard department, which borders Aveyron, where European Green party lawmaker and prominent anti-fracking campaigner Jose Bove is based.

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