

UK urges EU to cut red tape and clear way for shale

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British Prime Minister David Cameron arrives for a press conference at the end of the second and last day of an European Union (EU) Council meeting on October 25, 2013 at the EU Headquarters in Brussels.

Britain mounted a fresh crusade Friday to slash EU red tape London says strangles business—with a core demand that Brussels does not interfere with legislation on fracking.

Prime Minister David Cameron gathered a mini-summit of leaders including German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Italy's Enrico Letta to present a 30-point plan he said would save billions of euros each year.

French President Francois Hollande did not attend but European Commission head Jose Manuel Barroso, whose EU executive draws up thousands of laws and regulations, joined as did business leaders.

Cameron said he detected a "sea-change in thinking" in Brussels at a time when the budget for the EU's operations is being driven downwards following years in and out of recession for the states that fund the bloc.

A 30-point plan put forward also included business-driven calls for the EU to withdraw regulation already in the pipeline—and also to avoid new legislative proposals.

The key element may well be shale energy, much of it extracted by a controversial process known as [fracking](#) that involves cracking rock deep underground. Environmentalists argue the process can deplete and pollute groundwater.

Shale is having a radical effect on global energy markets, even though oil prices remain high due to tensions in the Middle East.



(From L, in the background) Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta, European Commission President Jose Manuel Durra Barroso and British Prime Minister David Cameron attend a meeting in Brussels on October 25, 2013.

It is driven by massive increases in production in Canada and particularly the United States, where falling [natural gas prices](#) are credited with giving a big boost to industrial productivity.

"On fracking we do need to take action across the board to enable this technology to go ahead," Cameron told a post-EU summit press conference.

Cameron said the "low-cost gas" revolution was "helping to keep America competitive" and at number three on his red-tape EU blacklist read: "Don't introduce new proposals on shale gas."

EU states are divided on fracking, with countries such as France banning the process.

Final summit conclusions on smarter regulation said there was a need for "withdrawing proposals that are no longer needed and by repealing legislation that is out of date."

But the text released by the leaders of the EU's 28 member states as a whole also kept a focus on environmental considerations.

It said regulation should always be drafted while "taking account of the need for a proper protection of consumers, health, the environment and employees."

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