

Albanian villagers who accuse an energy company of damaging their homes by fracking will get full compensation, the country's deputy prime minister said on Wednesday.

A group of the villagers from western Albania walked more than 100 kilometers (62 miles) to the capital Tirana and set up camp outside the energy ministry on Saturday to protest.

In a televised address, deputy prime minister Niko Peleshi said the villagers would get full compensation from the state budget and from the energy company, Bankers Petroleum, following an evaluation of the damage.

The protesters greeted the announcement with cheers of "Zharreza," the name of the village with the most damaged homes.

Their leader, Qani Rredhi, said that out of 700 houses, 570 were damaged and 70 were not habitable.

"Since 2010 we have suffered earthquake tremors of high intensity at various times, usually at night, even 30 quakes a day," he told Reuters.

Fracking involves pumping water and chemicals at high pressure through drill holes to prise open shale rocks holding gas and oil, a process used widely in the United States but which has proved controversial in parts of Europe due to concerns about potential damage to the environment.

Bankers Petroleum spokeswoman Laura Cela said the company would abide by the government's demand for it to stop using water injections in the region, but that it would only pay compensation if this was found to have caused the tremors.

The energy ministry said in a statement it had agreed with Bankers, owned since September by China's Geo-Jade, to contract an independent expert to rule on the causes of the tremors.

*Source: Reuters*