François Hollande got the ball rolling last spring during the French presidential election. During his campaign he announced his intention to reduce the share of nuclear power generation in France from 75% today to 50% by 2025. Observers did not know quite what to make of this statement. Until then, the opposition leader had not been known as an opponent of atomic power. Just months after Hollande’s election victory, however, the Environment and Industry Ministry presented an extensive study which concluded that wind and solar power were the “most promising resources” with which to facilitate the move toward using less nuclear power. Nevertheless, the 130-page study entitled, “Wind and Solar – energetic, industrial and social challenges” concluded that wind and solar power were the “most promising resources” with which to facilitate the move toward using less nuclear power. Nevertheless, the 130-page study entitled, “Wind and Solar – energetic, industrial and social challenges” concluded that wind and solar power were the “most promising resources” with which to facilitate the move toward using less nuclear power. Nevertheless, the 130-page study entitled, “Wind and Solar – energetic, industrial and social challenges” concluded that wind and solar power were the “most promising resources” with which to facilitate the move toward using less nuclear power. Nevertheless, the 130-page study entitled, “Wind and Solar – energetic, industrial and social challenges” concluded that wind and solar power were the “most promising resources” with which to facilitate the move toward using less nuclear power. Nevertheless, the 130-page study entitled, “Wind and Solar – energetic, industrial and social challenges” concluded that wind and solar power were the “most promising resources” with which to facilitate the move toward using less nuclear power. Nevertheless, the 130-page study entitled, “Wind and Solar – energetic, industrial and social challenges” concluded that wind and solar power were the “most promising resources” with which to facilitate the move toward using less nuclear power.

Work to be done: France’s solar installers can expect plenty of new business this year.

France is holding talks over its energy transition. The socialist government wants to keep the solar industry above water until the results are in at the end of the year. In addition to the incentives already lined up, a made-in-Europe bonus is in the works. The reaction within industry is divided.

Lifeline for PV

To prevent an erosion of competence in the renewables sector, the French Environment Minister, Delphine Batho, cast a lifeline to the industry early this year in form of “emergency measures to revive the French PV industry.” The measures are designed to keep the industry above water until support for domestic sources of renewable energy is reinstated within the framework of a new energy concept for France. Loyen says that 2013 will be a challenging transition year. “It is difficult, especially for small companies to hang on for another year with small returns.” Although the government has raised its target for new installations with its “emergency measures”
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In 2013, France wants to lend a hand to the rooftop systems business in particular.

Photo: Oliver Ristau

In 2013, France wants to lend a hand to the rooftop systems business in particular.

Photo: Oliver Ristau

**5 or 10 % EU bonus**

In the upcoming calls for tender, the association is calling for the introduction of higher quality standards in materials and installation. “It is important that the bidders participating in these calls for tenders have practical professional expertise and competent personnel. That will prevent the kind of damage we have seen in the past resulting from unprofessional installation.”

The GMPV is also in accord over yet another “quality characteristic,” the introduction of a 10 % bonus on roof systems for products made in the EU. To be eligible, the government says that systems must fulfill certain requirements: if the complete production chain, from wafer-to-cell or cell-to-module, including electrical testing, is located within an EU member state, a 5 % bonus will be added to the feed-in tariff. If both of these criteria are fulfilled (that is, both cell and module production occur within the EU) or if one of these two criteria is met and the complete production chain from ingot to wafer is located within the EU, a bonus of 10 % will be awarded.

The extra incentive for the French/European connection has met with a mixed reception in the industry. “Such a vehicle is not really effective to build up an industry,” says Enerplan Secretary General Loyen. “The French industry would be protected if it was competitive, and the best way to achieve this is to provide it with a secure volume and a sustainable framework.” Depending on a bonus to shore up French firms is “like playing lotto,” he says. Loyen is therefore calling for raising the 2020 PV expansion target from 5.4 GW to 20 GW within the framework of the negotiations over the new French energy strategy.

The plan to cut feed-in tariffs by 20 % for ground-mounted systems not built within the framework of the public tender process to just 8.2 €-ct/kWh has met with a less than enthusiastic response. “For solar farms, 2013 will be a tough year. We favour scrapping all of the public calls for tenders for solar farms and instead offering a tariff of 10 euro cents for any large-scale system.” The Syndicat des Energies Renouvelables (SER), a strong advocate for the utility-scale industry, also has no shortage of criticism for the measure. The organisation says that the 20 % cut is “a prejudice against companies positioned in this segment.”

Among such companies is Germany’s Aquila Capital. Boris Beltermann, a representative of the Hamburg-based fund manager said in response to an inquiry by S&WE, “In view of the severe cutbacks, we are very cautious with regard to new investments.”

Indeed, a renaissance of attractive FITs for solar farms is highly unlikely. Considering the problem of debt in France’s budget politics, the Hollande administration has scant means with which to finance the French transition to renewables. High incentives for ground-mounted systems are not in the cards.

Oliver Ristau
Setting a visible sign

The fact that the French government plans to further improve the conditions and therefore the situation of the domestic solar industry should not be taken as an invitation by the French solar sector to simply wait for better times. This, at least, seems to be the perspective of the French renewables association Syndicat des Energies Renouvelables (SER), which is encouraging France’s solar companies to strengthen their activities on the foreign markets. SER’s new “France Solar Industry” brand, which is expected to be a window into French know-how in solar electricity production, can be seen as an effort to assist the domestic industry. Compared to some of their European neighbours, the solar companies in France are still having trouble to gain shares on the international renewable energy markets, says SER. The situation is particularly difficult for small and medium-sized solar companies. SER sees several reasons for this. The French solar market continues to be insufficiently structured and incentive programmes often go unnoticed by the market participants, particularly by small and medium-sized companies. Another problem is the lack of coordination between businesses, policy-makers and the French government. To address all these problems, SER has proposed to raise more international awareness for French solar products. A comparison with German and US competitors reveals that products made in France are still not visible enough. Changing this, however, will require businesses and their institutional partners, such as the Ministry for Foreign Trade, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs or the Ministry of the Environment, to work closely together.

Senersun, a company based in Bordeaux, has been leading the way. The module manufacturer recently entered into an agreement to supply the company Solar-Bau with a nominal capacity of 23 MW of solar modules for distribution in Poland. The Germany-based project developer plans to use the modules both for its own engineering and construction work as well as for reselling the modules on a retail basis. Under the agreement, Senersun will become Solar-Bau’s official partner in the country. “We started to work with Senersun for two reasons: not only we knew they were implementing what we believe is currently the most stringent QC programme in the solar industry, but they also offered to support us on marketing grounds, which we saw as a real proof of their commitment toward a long-term business partnership,” says Solar-Bau President Marek Segeth.

Markus Grunwald

Further information:
SER: www.enr.fr
Senersun: www.senersun.com