



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

Photo: Oliver Ristau

to 1 GW, the fact remains that only a fraction of that figure will be realized this year, according to Loyen. Approvals for the soon-to-be announced round of tenders for large-scale systems exceeding 250 kW (annual target 400 MW) will not be granted before November. For middle-sized systems between 100 kW and 250 kW (annual target 120 MW) permits will not be granted until 2014, says Batho's ministry. "These PV power plants will not be connected to the grid before the second half of 2014," says Loyen. What remains for 2013 is what's left over from previous calls for tender, some 300 to 400 MW. Rooftop systems of up to 100 kW in size comprise the greater share of the market, and these installations doubled in volume to 400 MW. In fact, for companies with a share of this business, 2013 could turn out to be better than last year, says Loyen.

This view jibes with the assessment of the Groupement des Métiers du Photovoltaïque (GMPV), the solar division of the French building industry association Fédération Française du Bâtiment (FFB), which expressed to S&WE its satisfaction over the new political esprit for PV. "It is the first time in two years that the government has announced positive measures to develop photovoltaics," says GMPV representative Vincent Fiaccabrino. That, he said, has provided much needed moral support to the industry. On the material side, he praised the planned increase to the feed-in tariff (FIT) for simplified integrated installations of up to 36 kW by 5% to 17.9 €-ct/kWh. Simplified integration is a term applied to systems that are not directly fitted into the roof skin, as completely integrated systems are. The requirement is that roof elements are replaced and that the system is installed at the same time as the roof skin. In addition, Fiaccabrino praised the simplification of the tariffs for fully-integrated rooftop systems. Previously, the law had distinguished between private houses, schools/hospitals, and other types of buildings, a distinction the GMPV considered overly complicated. Now, any operator of a fully integrated system will receive the same tariff, the highest, which is set at 34.15 €-ct/kWh. However, this rate only applies to systems with generation capacities up to 9 kW. Any system up to 36 kW – which previously had their own tariff – will have to make do with the same tariff as simplified integrated systems in future, says Fiaccabrino.

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 fulfil 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." "In the past, Aquila Capital has managed to acquire solar farms in France with conditions which cannot be duplicated today."

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.

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