

## Signs of a new French Revolution?

*Regions stand up to the national government and propose ambitious support for the deployment of the photovoltaic market*

On 18 February, the Rhone-Alpes Regional Council in France voted a measure to promote generation of electricity by photovoltaics, a noteworthy vote for more than one reason.

Instead of the direct investment aids that have prevailed to date, the regional officials adopted a scheme that is new to France – a 0.5 €/kWh premium based on the expected electricity production for five years designed so as to compensate the distortion created for the photovoltaic industry by the conditions for implementing the State tax credit to favour the use of renewable forms of energy for private citizens.

The leaders in the Rhone-Alpes from all political tendencies, thus confirmed their commitment to photovoltaics in a region that is undeniably the leader in the sector in France thanks to the internationally renowned scientific, industrial and associative network found there.

This measure, which will be integrated in the future "Regional Energy Plan" that is scheduled for adoption next April, is described as "temporary" by the Region itself in anticipation of a feed-in tariff improved to € 0.5 per kWh that the Region cannot decide on its own (only the Minister of Industry has the power to adopt this measure by decree). Thus it clearly expresses its support of a demand voiced by the entire photovoltaic industry in Europe.

A feed-in tariff of € 0.5 /kWh is in fact the only measure that can enable France to get on board as this new energy technology takes off at a worldwide growth rate of 30% per year, but it has met with staunch opposition from part of the administration, particularly in the Ministry of Industry that is responsible for energy policy in France.

Unless this rate is adopted quickly, the entire French photovoltaic industry will become dangerously vulnerable since it will be unable to rely on the domestic market to meet increasingly stiff competition on an international level. If this obstacle lasts, the outcome may very well be the pure and simple liquidation of the sector, and with it, the several thousand jobs it provides.

In this context, the vote by the Rhone-Alpes Regional Council is particularly remarkable in that the measure was approved almost unanimously (142 votes out of 157, only the Communist Party voted against it), which certainly pleads for its rapid extension to all regions in France.

Among favourable voters were Mr. Hervé Gaymard, who had kept his seat on the Rhone-Alpes Regional Council while being Minister of Finance, supervising the State secretary for Industry in that capacity.

After the declarations at the highest level of the French State, after the conclusions of the Beffa report in favour of solar energy, and at a time when strategic decisions must be taken in the months to come, the French and European photovoltaic energy hopes that this event is the sign of a breakthrough – of having finally been heard by our political leaders, since the high-level administration obstinately refuses any support and prevents any positive evolution.

For more information:

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