

SOLAR-ERA.NET

ERA-NET on Solar Electricity for the Implementation of the Solar Europe Industry Initiative

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Summary

SOLAR-ERA.NET – an EU funded FP7 project running from 2012 to 2016 – is a network that brings together more than 20 RTD and innovation programmes in the field of solar electricity technologies, i.e. photovoltaics (PV) and concentrating solar power (CSP) / solar thermal electricity (STE), in the European Research Area. The network of national and regional funding organisations has been established in order to increase transnational cooperation between RTD and innovation programmes and to contribute to achieving the objectives of the Solar Europe Industry Initiative (SEII) through dedicated transnational activities, especially joint transnational calls on an annual basis. The first joint call found great interest (with 60 preproposals submitted with a total project volume of 90 MEUR) and the larger part of full proposals submitted has been suggested for funding (currently in the negotiation and contractual phase). A second joint call was launched early 2014 with the participation of even more (17) funding agencies from all over the European Research Area.

Purpose of the Work

SOLAR-ERA.NET shall contribute to reaching the objectives of the Solar Europe Industry Initiative (SEII) by carrying out the coordination and support actions for the implementation of the SEII between national and regional RTD and innovation programmes, mainly through joint transnational calls. Through the support of the funding organisations of some 50 MEUR, more than 100 MEUR shall be mobilised for transnational RTD and innovation projects.

Approach

As the largest ERA-NET (network in the European Research Area) ever in the solar power field, SOLAR-ERA.NET involves more than 20 RTD and innovation programmes dealing with PV and CSP. This high level of involvement of most relevant stakeholders provides excellent outreach and the coordination needed for an efficient and coherent approach in the highly diverse and versatile RTD landscape. For launching joint calls in such a context, the network strives to set up call implementation mechanisms that are efficient, pragmatic and as smooth as possible despite of the fact of having to deal with an “additional” transnational level involving inherently some coordinative and administrative issues. On the other side, it is expected that the transnational level allows for new project consortia and highly innovative projects. By identifying and choosing SEII priority topics for transnational calls carried out by SOLAR-ERA.NET, the network selects and funds industrially relevant transnational RTD and innovation projects in the field of solar electricity technologies.

Scientific Innovation and Relevance

The project proposals potentially supported by SOLAR-ERA.NET members must clearly demonstrate i) potential commercial impact / relevance to industrial and market needs / contribution to the Solar Europe Industry Initiative (SEII) and added transnational value, ii) scientific and technological excellence and iii) high quality and efficiency of the implementation and the management.

On a more general level, the SEII is embedded in the European Strategic Energy Technology Plan (SET-Plan) which aims to increase, coordinate and focus EU support on key low-carbon energy technologies in order to achieve Europe's 2020 energy objectives in the future. The SEII is a joint initiative of the industry sector, EC and member states.

Results and Conclusions

The first set of SOLAR-ERA.NET transnational calls PV1 and CSP1 was launched in March 2013 with a public funding budget of 12 MEUR from about 15 funding agencies, following a two-stage procedure. More than 250 applicants submitted 60 transnational preproposals with a project volume of more than 90 MEUR. 21 full proposals (17 PV projects and 4 CSP projects) with a project volume of more than 40 MEUR were finally filed in and evaluated. The larger part of these full proposals was suggested for funding. Formal funding decision, negotiation and contractual phase is currently running.

The second set of SOLAR-ERA.NET transnational calls PV2 and CSP2 was launched early 2014 with the participation of additional funding agencies (Israel and North-Rhine-Westphalia), increasing the total number of countries and regions participating in the joint calls to 17.

First experiences show that SOLAR-ERA.NET joint calls find great interest in the industry sector and research community particularly due to the wider set of priority topics proposed and transnational orientation allowing for new and innovative consortia building.

Results on projects funded in the first call, preliminary information on research and industry response in the preproposal phase of the second call as well as a first assessment of the outreach and impact of the SOLAR-ERA.NET calls will be available by the week of the 29th EU PVSEC.