

European Solar Thermal Technology Platform launched with support of EU Energy Commissioner Piebalgs

Brussels, 31 May 2006. The European Solar Thermal Technology Platform (ESTTP) was officially launched in Brussels, yesterday. The Platform was set-up to develop a comprehensive strategy for research and market deployment of solar thermal technologies in Europe. Commissioner Piebalgs welcomed the initiative of the solar thermal industry and research sector. He said that the ESTTP was “vital to secure the competitiveness of our industry”.

The official launch of the Platform followed almost one year of preparation and discussion on the Solar Thermal Vision 2030, which was developed by industry and research institutes from all around Europe. This document outlines the sector's vision for the future use of solar thermal energy. For the building sector, which is responsible for 40% of Europe's energy supply, it presents the concept of the Active Solar Building, which will be entirely heated and cooled by solar thermal energy and which is expected to be the building standard in 2030. The overall vision of the solar thermal branch is to supply up to 50% of the low-temperature energy demand of Europe by solar thermal by 2030.

The Solar Thermal Vision will serve as a guiding point to identify a comprehensive strategy for research and market deployment of solar thermal technologies. Amongst the key research topics will be advanced heat stores, medium-temperature collectors, solar cooling systems and system technology. Some research areas can provide decisive results in the short and medium term, while other areas require a long-term approach.

The Chairman of the preliminary ESTTP Steering Committee, Gerhard Stryi-Hipp of the European Solar Thermal Industry Federation (ESTIF) said: “So far most people have drastically underestimated the potential of solar thermal technologies. Although applications like solar domestic hot water and space heating are already common in some European regions, the potential for further technological and market development all over Europe is enormous. Therefore there is a huge need for increased R&D efforts, especially in new applications such as solar cooling and solar industrial process heat. “The solar thermal industry and research institutes have established the European Solar Thermal Technology Platform in order to develop a comprehensive strategy to exploit the full potential of solar thermal energy in Europe.

ESTTP

In his speech, EU Energy Commissioner Andris Piebalgs expressed his strong conviction that the European solar thermal industry and research institutes had the capacity to maintain the technological leadership and to increase the world market share of European products. "I am convinced that by joining our efforts, the Commission and the ESTIF members will succeed in bringing the solar thermal energy to the place it deserves in the market. I also believe that this will contribute to the move towards sustainable energy schemes, to improve EU industry competitiveness and job creation".

Mechtild Rothe, Member of the European Parliament, strongly welcomed the launch of the ESTTP. Speaking about the current political debate around the forthcoming 7th European Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP7), Ms Rothe reminded the audience of the need for increased R&D funds for renewable energy research: together with several colleagues, she has tabled a proposal to the European Parliament, to earmark 2/3 of the FP7 budget foreseen for energy research to the work on renewable energy technologies and energy efficiency.

It is expected that the results of the ESTTP will also help the European Commission and other R&D funding institutions to focus on high impact topics. By involving all stakeholders, the Platform will identify which R&D topics are most likely to boost the uptake of solar thermal energy.

The first meeting of the preliminary ESTTP Steering Committee is foreseen for 17th July and the foundation of the ESTTP working groups is expected in the autumn.

Background information on the ESTTP:

Technology Platforms are seen as a very important instrument to influence the future development of a technology. In order to strengthen the pan European understanding and development of solar thermal technology, especially within the EU's 7th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development, an Initiator Group has been working towards a European Solar Thermal Technology Platform (ESTTP) for more than one year.

The ESTTP Initiator Group was founded by several active members of both the European Solar Thermal Industry Association (ESTIF) and the European Renewable Energy Centres Agency (EUREC Agency) and it is strongly supported by these associations.

ESTTP

The Initiator Group worked out a structure for the platform and together with several experts from all over Europe, developed a draft of a solar thermal vision document for 2030. After the first presentation of these activities at the estec2005 conference in Freiburg, Andris Piebalgs wrote to the group to encourage them to establish the platform. In addition, the group received very positive reactions from ministries of several member states, especially from Germany and Austria, all of whom announced support for the ESTTP.

Aims of the ESTTP

- Strengthen awareness of the huge potential of solar thermal technologies in contributing to a sustainable energy system
- Increase R&D activities in the solar thermal sector
- Accelerate the development of the solar thermal technology
- Prepare the conditions for a broad dissemination of advanced solar thermal technologies

Objectives of the ESTTP

- Develop a vision for Solar Thermal Technology in 2030
- Work out a Strategic Research Agenda to achieve the vision
- Support of the implementation of the Strategic Research Agenda
- Identify non-technological framework conditions facilitating a broad market deployment for solar thermal technologies