

“The technology is there, still we are simply moving too slowly.”

Peter Thiele is President of Sharp Energy Solutions Europe and responsible for photovoltaics, electrical storage and HEMS in Europe, Middle East and Africa. Mr. Thiele has been with the company since 1996 and has a background in optoelectronics engineering. For more than four years, Mr. Thiele has also been a board member with the Bundesverband Solarwirtschaft (Federal Association Solar Industry) and was recently re-elected. The soon reached 52 GW cap for the monetary support of photovoltaic systems is of special importance to him. Joint Forces for Solar, a partner of Sharp Energy Solutions, interviewed Mr. Thiele on the role of Europe and Germany in the global energy transition and necessary actions to accelerate photovoltaic expansion in Germany.



JF4S: The 25th World Climate Conference in Madrid once again brought together political leaders and industry experts to discuss climate change and mitigation methods. Your conclusion is that COP-25 has failed. Why do you arrive at this conclusion, what was missing?

Peter Thiele: There have been major World Climate Conferences in history with good intentions and good outcome such as the Kyoto Protocol (COP3 in 1997). It was unbinding, but went into the right direction as the first document of common interest in climate change mitigation. COP21 in Paris in 2015 was a major step forward with a binding agreement and first review of mechanisms. In Madrid (COP25), the parties had the chance to define a concrete action plan with binding commitments and detailed control mechanisms, but conflicts of interests and a lack of willingness to commit lead to postponing the set-up of a tangible plan to COP 26. Major industrial countries stuck to individual interests to protect what they have while countries strongly affected by climate change are more willing to act.

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We are in a state of urgency and need to make a jointly approved plan with all participating states, including the US. It's a difficult process to align all interests, but all participants left with homework to do. I am hopeful for COP26.

JF4S: The European Union has positioned itself as a global leader in climate action with the Green Deal. Do you see the EU and Germany both politically and economically on a leading and the right track concerning global climate action? How do you see Germany's position in particular?

Peter Thiele: The EU has always taken a leading role in all aspects of climate change mitigation, not only with a pioneering position in technological developments, but also when it comes to the mindset and legal framework necessary to implement renewable energy and climate change mitigation measures. Of course, there are and have been difficulties in keeping the EU together as a strong community, also around directions in rolling out renewable energies. With Ursula von der Leyen introducing the Green Deal and the direction to make the EU the first emission-free continent by 2050, the EU provides a strong vision - no one has done this before! With this vision, the EU will globally take the leading role.

In Germany, the latest developments have been disappointing, especially with the recent law for the coal exit with no reflection of renewables. It is not a lack of willingness by most

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industries, the people or certain politicians. It is the absence of strong concrete supporting decisions pro renewable energy, combined with ambitious targets, and the legal implementation. Right now, political action is driven by a strong coal lobby and fears of some leading industries for an electricity gap. The automotive industry needs to gain time with regards to its developments in e-mobility to not further fall behind Asia. E-mobility leads to a growing demand for electricity. With

immediate actions to implement more renewable energy on a large scale, combined with a variety of storage types, sector coupling and PWX, a quicker transition is possible, and a gap would not occur. In the past 10 years there was no focused support for the renewable industry in Germany. Many Solar companies became insolvent. The recent closures of wind factories confirm it, and lead to losses of 1000s of jobs. The impression arises that conventional energy deserves more support with billions of Euros, while little attention is given to the renewable energy industries. Obviously the Federal Ministry of Economy and Energy is trying to protect conventional energy plants and prolonging operations.

Looking from the outside, Germany is still taking a lead in guiding other states as a role model. The Berlin Energy Transition Dialogue, an annual conference organized by Bundesverband Solarwirtschaft (BSW) (Federal Association Solar Industry), has more and more states participating every year to learn from Germany on how to implement and design renewable energy, with a more accelerated approach. Overall, however, Germany

has to be much faster to realize its own transition, and needs to set higher annual installation targets for all renewable energy types.

JF4S: In November 2019 you were re-elected as member of the board of the Bundesverband Solarwirtschaft (BSW). Of special concern to you is the 52 GW cap for the monetary support of photovoltaic. Will this be a further blow to the solar industry and renewable energy in general or will it lead to a shift toward more installations of solar+storage systems and home owner autarky?

Peter Thiele: The 52 GW cap should be taken away! It should not be used as a weapon by political parties to enforce changes to regulations in wind. We need stable frameworks and regulations for the transition from fossil to renewable sources to offer stability for investors and planners. Especially home owners and SMEs are left in the air with self-consumption being made unnecessarily complicated. The segment of up to 750kW is a major segment, and still needs the stability from the EEG. The combination of solar and storage benefits the residential and commercial segments, and also improves grid stability – that is a good development. Certification of smart meters to make use of digitalization took extremely long, to the point that only three devices are approved to date. In general, the technology is available and intelligent systems further improve the energy sector, but could have been much more advanced in the German market already.

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JF4S: Energy demand is growing with e-mobility on the rise while we are talking about caps for renewable energy sources and (a delayed) phasing-out of coal. From the looks of it, we are indeed moving toward a gap – what actions need to be taken to move ahead with the energy transition and meeting the growing demand?

Peter Thiele: Experts have shown that there is enough space on rooftops and other sites in Germany to install a total of 98 GW by 2030. But Germany, particularly the German government, is moving too slow to take advantage of the potential. We can see that the different industry segments around renewable energy are moving closer together – keyword “sector coupling”. Political discussions currently don’t focus enough on renewables. It is almost discontinued, and the Federal Ministry of Economy and Energy seems to only cover the interests of the coal industry and direct affiliates. There is a certain anxiety in the energy industry and the German society in general whether there will be enough electricity during the transition to continue supply. Therefore, the phasing-out of coal and monetary schemes for renewable energy sources should go hand in hand. Currently, the

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German government is not taking enough measures to boost this transition. The technology is there, still we are simply moving too slowly.

JF4S: The Joint Forces for Solar are proud to have Sharp as a partner in the mission to further accelerate solar energy around the world. What other actions is Sharp playing to accelerate the energy transition? How is Sharp addressing its own energy consumption?

Peter Thiele: As a manufacturer of electronic devices and energy solutions, Sharp is taking actions globally to reduce CO2 emissions. We design products with low energy consumption, easy recycling and repair in mind, equip all our factories with photovoltaic systems, and comply with national environmental regulations and standards. With the “Sharp Eco Vision 2050”, Sharp has defined three main fields of action: climate change, resource recycling and safety and security. In the field of climate change, one of the two goals is to achieve net zero CO2 emissions in Sharp business activities and supply chain.

On a smaller scale, the Hamburg office of our EU team is a shared office building where we made sure to install a solar power system on the roof.

JF4S: What is your outlook on the future?

Peter Thiele: With Fridays for Future, the Green Deal and Greta sailing to the US to talk in front of the UN, there has been a big increase in awareness about climate change and it will hopefully lead to a change in the mindset of people. Individual behaviors have to change and from my experience, young people are more open to new ideas and have clearer intentions since it is their future that is directly affected. For example, e-scooters in the cities and opportunities of car-sharing are mostly used by young people. A car is not a status symbol in young people’s minds. Clean transport is the concern. Young families build eco-friendly houses and buy regional products.

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The public is the strongest driver to accelerate the momentum in photovoltaic and energy transition. Unfortunately, politicians still have the greater power to control mitigation measures and actions that are accelerated or dropped. But I am certain: the German government will experience the dedication and confidence of the young generation in the next elections. The behavior of the traditional parties is noticed and their will and willingness to move ahead and make a change will play an important role in the voting decision.

On a global level we can see that emerging markets, for example in Africa, are highly interested in solar systems and are increasingly engaged to invest into renewable energy

sources. With economic growth, the energy demand is increasing and more and more people will also use cars as a means of transport. Next to the environmental benefits of renewable energy and photovoltaic, installing a PV plant is a lot cheaper and faster than building a new coal power plant. This is particularly the case for countries with a centralized energy utility provider like China. Another very relevant driver is smog in Megacities.

Whether we still have enough time, I cannot say, but we have to come together to work towards the goal of a global energy transition with the commitment from all parties and stakeholders. The chance is still there, let's take up the challenges.

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