



Energy from the desert: "It has to be an exchange, rather than merely a sale of electricity"

18 November 2010

Extensive construction of wind and solar power plants is planned in North Africa as part of the desert electricity project, DESERTEC. What are the aims of the North African countries with regard to this plan? How do they view DESERTEC? In the interview, Prof. Chiheb Bouden, Director of the Ecole Nationale d'Ingénieurs de Tunisia, discusses renewable energy in Tunisia and the DLR project Energy in the Middle East and North Africa, enerMENA.

Under the leadership of the German Aerospace Center (Deutsches Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt; DLR), the enerMENA project is targeting intensified cooperation between engineers and technicians from Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. During November and December 2010, engineers and technicians will, for the first time, be trained in the construction and operation of solar power plants. The training will take place in Almería, Spain.

Interview by Dorothee Bürkle

What do people in Tunisia think about Desertec?

Prof. Chiheb Bouden: It is an important project for Tunisia. Because Tunisia does not produce oil, we import energy. The price of energy is rising, so in the future we will have to look for alternative forms of energy production. The introduction of Desertec would be a good opportunity for us, first because we can produce energy, and second because we will have to be connected to the European energy grid. This is also a form of energy security for the country. Third, it would be a good way to introduce this technology, so we can have technology transfer and can develop our own plants later.

It might be also interesting to produce some components of the system. Of course, we cannot produce entire systems in Tunisia, but it would be worth it to start producing some parts in Tunisia, because this could reduce the overall price of the systems.

Which do you think is more important: to produce electricity for your local market or to export it?

Bouden: I think we have to find a good compromise. We have to start to produce electricity and then fix some rates; a certain rate for local consumption and a certain rate for export. We should probably have a network where we can balance our needs. It has to be an exchange, rather than merely a sale of electricity.

How can your country provide experts to build plants?

Bouden: We have a lot of good universities with a lot of graduates who are looking for high-quality and challenging jobs. These universities can help to introduce the Desertec concept because they can offer new programmes to teach students about this technology.

Is there no fear that companies from abroad bring their own experts and take only the land?

Bouden: I don't think so. Tunisia is an open country and we have lot of European companies and investors here. Our experience is that they employ many Tunisian experts. In the beginning, they start out with European staff to train local employees. From this point of view, I have no fears because that the level of education in Tunisia is rather good.

You have been involved in the enerMENA project from the very beginning. What is your experience so far?

Bouden: Positive. I have been teaching about solar energy since the 1980s; however, I never taught about Concentrating Solar Power because there was no application for that technique in Tunisia. That has changed now, we need to have people with experience and get in touch with different people from the North and the South; we need to interact because both of us have difficulties and can learn from one another.

Contacts

Dorothee Bürkle
German Aerospace Center (DLR)
Media Relations, Energy and Transport Research
Tel.: +49 2203 601-3492
Fax: +49 2203 601-3249
Dorothee.Buerkle@dlr.de

Dr.-Ing. Louy Qoaider
German Aerospace Center (DLR)
Institute of Solar Research
Tel.: +34 950 278-817
Fax: +34 950 260-0315
louy.qoaider@dlr.de

Prof. Chiheb Bouden



Prof. Chiheb Bouden, Directeur Ecole Nationale d'Ingénieurs de Tunis: "It is an important project for Tunisia. Because Tunisia does not produce oil, we import energy. The price of energy is rising, so in the future we will have to look for alternative forms of energy production."

Credit: DLR (CC-BY 3.0).

Contact details for image and video enquiries as well as information regarding DLR's terms of use can be found on the DLR portal imprint.