



German solar platform Zolar doubles year-on-year revenues despite Covid-19. CEZ increases its stake through Inven Capital

A year after acquiring a minority stake in the German start-up Zolar, the CEZ Group venture capital fund Inven Capital is the lead investor among the current investors increasing their financial stake by another €15 million. Despite the coronavirus epidemic, Zolar has doubled their annual revenue and aims to spread their activities not just throughout Germany but also by expanding abroad. They will use the acquired capital to strengthen the unique platform which connects people interested in photovoltaic and battery systems with suppliers and installation firms.

Aside from Inven Capital, the existing investors include Munich-based BayWa RE Energy Ventures, Norwegian Statkraft Ventures, Heartcore Capital and global investment firm Partech Ventures. These investors will provide the German start-up Zolar with money for additional development. The €15 million increase was initiated by Inven Capital and the existing investors and it takes the Series-B financing round to a total of 25 million euro. In the past four years, Zolar has built a successful digital platform, which is used by thousands of customers across Germany to purchase photovoltaic plants and battery systems. The platform also connects purchasing customers to more than 250 registered installation firms and entrepreneurs. Not even the coronavirus crisis could curb the rising number of sales. On the contrary, Zolar wants to make the most of the current surge of interest in household electricity production and storage.

"This large internal financing round with EUR 15 million of fresh capital is a confidence vote to use this opportunity in the market and to move the company to the next level after they had already shown a strong performance this past year," said Tomáš Pleskač, a Member of the Board of Directors of CEZ and Chief Renewable Energy and Distribution Officer.

"We see strong signs for anti-cyclicality in the PV market, driven by the threat of the pandemic and recession. As a result, people thrive to achieve energy independence while increasing the value of their property. This creates great opportunities for Zolar, which is also confirmed by Zolar's 100% annual revenue growth," said Petr Míkovec, Managing Director of Inven Capital.

According to the international analytics company EuPD Research, demand last year for solar energy from German households increased to 78,500 new solar installations, representing a year-on-year increase of 41%. Increasingly more customers are choosing the combination of a photovoltaic power plant with a battery storage system. More than 65,000 of these were installed last year, growing by 75 % in comparison to 2017. According to BSW Solar (German Solar Association), only around 10% from the 15 million households living in single or double-family homes currently have photovoltaics installed, which implies huge market opportunities.

“The new capital paves the way for us to become the first address for those who want to switch to clean energy via solar systems, to expand internationally and to establish ourselves as a data provider. Not only can our customers use the platform to choose tailor-made solar solutions, but we are also managing the installation side through certified external installation partners, according to the availability and the customer’s preferences,” explained Alexander Melzer, the founder and CEO of Zolar. This eliminates the common problem where the technicians of companies supplying solar systems are swamped with orders, meaning the customer must wait a long time for installation.

Inven Capital acquired a minority stake in Zolar last September, in a €10 million investment round. The current additional investment of €15 million is provided purely by the five existing investors.

Did you know that Inven Capital’s investment portfolio includes other successful projects such as...

... construction of the first green jet fuel plant in Europe by the company Sunfire (2015 investment) in Norway? By 2026, it should be producing 100 million litres of renewable jet fuel per year, thus saving up to 250,000 tonnes of CO2 every year. This year, Sunfire became a member of the European Commission’s Clean Hydrogen Alliance. Its aim is to design a roadmap to allow an increase in clean hydrogen production to 40 GW by 2030.

...the sale of more than 1,000,000 smart thermostats by tado° (2016 investment) to European households? According to estimates, more than 7 million European households own a smart thermostat.

...cooperation in implementing the Gaia-X European data storage site through Cloud&Heat (2017 investment)? The EU is striving to build a common data infrastructure independent of private suppliers.

...a charging system from the Israeli company Driivz (2019 investment), which helps electric car drivers plan their route to more than 220 CEZ charging stations? Driivz technology will also manage the planned MOL charging infrastructure, which will allow e-drivers travel from the Czech border all the way to the Black Sea.

About Zolar

The greentech company Zolar offers photovoltaic systems, which homeowners are able to custom plan, compare and order online, at a fixed price. By means of the Zolar online configurator, homeowners can customize the components of their solar energy system according to their needs and will receive a personal consultation at the same time from one of our solar energy experts. Zolar’s broad network of local partner companies install the systems on-site. The Berlin-based start-up employs 100 people and pursues the vision of installing a solar system on every roof worldwide to enable the independence of private households from the public power grid. Zolar empowers its customers to promote the energy turnaround, to reduce the CO2 footprint and thus make an effective contribution to climate protection.

About Inven Capital

INVEN CAPITAL is a venture capital fund of the CEZ Group supported by the European Investment Bank (EIB). EIB financing is implemented from resources of the European Fund for Strategic

Investment (EFSI). Inven Capital's strategy is to seek out investment opportunities in small, innovative and growing smart energy companies. It primarily focuses on later-stage growth investment opportunities with a sound business model proven by achieved earnings and long-term growth potential. Inven Capital's goal is to generate long-term value through active collaboration with the management of the companies it invests in and to actively support organic or acquisition-based growth. Companies in Inven Capital's portfolio can take advantage of CEZ Group's extensive expertise in the energy sector, its client base and technology synergies for their further development. The fund is a full member of Invest Europe (<https://www.investeurope.eu> — European Private Equity and Venture Capital Association) and CVCA (Czech Private Equity and Venture Capital Association). Since its foundation in 2015, Inven Capital has invested in two companies, two of which it has already successfully exited.

Alice Horáková, spokesperson for the CEZ Group