
EU LIKELY TO CUT MINIMUM IMPORT PRICE FOR CHINESE SOLAR PANELS

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BRUSSELS (Reuters) □ The European Union is likely to reduce the minimum price that Chinese solar panel producers are allowed to sell into Europe after a meeting on Thursday of trade representatives from EU countries, EU sources said. The possible reduction has been opposed by EU panel manufacturers who say it will kill jobs in the sector and EU importers and others in the industry who argue that it will not cut prices enough. Chinese solar panel imports have been subject to measures to counter dumping and subsidies since 2013, with an 18-month extension agreed by EU countries earlier this year. Chinese companies that sell below a set minimum prices are subject to import duties. The European Commission has proposed a gradual phasing out of the measures, including a schedule that reduces the minimum import price every three months. The trade representatives voted but did not yield a majority in favour or against the plan, EU sources said, leaving the Commission free to carry it out. The European Union faces a delicate balancing act between the interests of EU manufacturers and those benefiting from cheap imports, while also being concerned about the response from Beijing, seen as a possible ally in fights against protectionism and climate change. The EU and China came close to a trade war in 2013 over EU allegations of dumping by Chinese solar panel exporters. EU ProSun, a group of manufacturers including Germany's now insolvent SolarWorld, said that a reduction in minimum prices would kill jobs and investments in Europe and gift a key enabling technology to China. SolarPower Europe, which represents solar industry participants who are opposed to duties, backs a variable minimum price but says the schedule set by the Commission does not take into account market price reductions since the start of the year. It argues that the proposed move would hamper solar power investment in Europe.

(Reporting By Philip Blenkinsop; Editing by David Goodman)

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