



Speech delivered by Hans E. Schweickardt

Chairman of Grande Dixence SA Official event held on April 30, 2010

Only the spoken version shall be authentic

Mister Gilbert Lorétan, president of the Grand Council,

Mister Jean-Michel Cina, vice-président of the Valais State Council,

Mister National Councillor Christian van Singer,

Mister Prefect fo the district of Hérens, Léo Fardel

Mister Werner Bühlmann, deputy director of OFEN

The presidents of the licensing municipalities of Grande Dixence SA and Alpiq Suisse SA,

Ladies and gentlemen the representatives of the federal, cantonal and municipal authorities,

Directors of the partner companies,

Ladies and gentlemen the media representatives,

Dear colleagues and friends,

Pride and emotion - these are the feelings with which I am imbued today on the occasion of the official ceremony to mark the commissioning of the Bieudron power station, which was successfully completed last January, and the sixtieth anniversary of Grande Dixence SA. Two events that we cherish particularly, along with the inauguration of our new information pavilion and visit circuit.

I wish to thank you all very warmly for having agreed to share this solemn moment with us. The year 2010 indeed marks a new stage in the history of La Grande Dixence. And we are proud to be celebrating it in your presence.

Pride. This word runs like a thread through the whole history of the fantastic project that the Grande Dixence dam was and remains.

In August 1950 the Grande Dixence joint stock company was established and the works were able to begin.

La Grande Dixence is uncontestedly the flagship of Swiss hydroelectricity, the cornerstone of our renewable energy production, which is essential to the security of our country's electricity supply. A pioneering project, and nothing short of an epic for the 3,000 or so people who worked on this avant-garde construction site, often under very difficult conditions: cold, storms, altitude.

In the nineteen fifties, the plan for this exceptional hydroelectric facility built right at the heart of the Valais, in the val des Dix, surpassed by far all that had been built until then in this sector – in terms of dimensions, design boldness and the sums at stake.

La Grande Dixence is also the feat that allowed the water from 35 glaciers and an incalculable number of watercourses to be collected. It is the genius that presided over the construction of the highest gravity dam in the world, with its height of 285 metres, capable of storing 400 million m³ of water. With 80 water intakes and around one hundred kilometres of galleries. So that small streams can come together to form a great reservoir! Finally, it was ambition that allowed 15 years of titanic works to be completed. And thus to contribute sustainably to the electricity supply in Switzerland.

In 1965 all the structures of the Grand Dixence complex were completed. From then on, the power stations of Fionnay, Nendaz and Chandoline took turns at transforming this considerable mass of water into electrical power, sufficient to supply the equivalent of 400,000 households with electricity.

New structures were built on the site between 1993 and 1998 to increase the production capacity of the complex. This was the case of the Bieudron underground power station, which forms an integral part of the Cleuson-Dixence facility. The Cleuson-Dixence complex made it possible to optimize the tapping of the gigantic energy potential accumulated behind the Grande Dixence dam. And to multiply its power output - and thus its flexibility - by 2.5.

Pride, of course, in all those achievements

But also emotion. Because on December 12, 2000 a terrible accident occurred in the Cleuson-Dixence installations. The penstock that conveyed the water from the Grande Dixence dam to the Bieudron power station was, unfortunately, to fail. The water that gushed out from it flooded down the slopes, turning into torrents of mud and rocks. Three persons lost their lives in the accident. It was a terrible fateful occurrence that we sincerely regret.

We also wanted this day of celebration to be a day of commemoration. I will therefore ask you to be silent for a few moments to honour the memory of Mrs. Marie-Cécile Monnet, Mr. Raphaël Monnet and Mrs. Marie-Dominique Favre, who departed this life more than 9 years ago, and to think of their families, especially of Mr Isaac Monnet who is here today with us.

To pay them tribute, I suggest we listen to the *Stabat Mater* by Pergolèse, the last work of this musician who died in the prime of life. A fine mediation on suffering and hope.

(Music)

Thank you for this moment of remembrance.

And now, let us turn to the future.

After a 10-year stoppage and the temporary loss of 1200 megawatts, the Cleuson-Dixence facilities have been re-commissioned. It is the result of four and a half years of works and six months of testing.

It was necessary, among other things, to install a penstock within the penstock - a re-lining in technical terms - and then to work around the area of the accident by means of an excavated bypass and, finally, to ensure maximum safety for the whole of the structure. This rehabilitation process required the work of 600 co-workers, 24 hours a day. We wish to take this opportunity to thank them very much for their commitment and dedication.

The company Cleuson-Dixence Constructions SA, which had been established in 2003 to carry out these works and whose efficiency I wish to emphasize, handed over the facility to its owners, Grande Dixence SA and Alpiq Suisse SA, at the beginning of this year, in line with the planned time schedule and budget, which was CHF 365 million.

The re-commissioning of Cleuson-Dixence is, of course, a commercial and political challenge of the utmost importance.

The reinforcement of these production facilities will make it possible to react very quickly to the demand for electricity during peak times. As everyone knows, the compensation energy requirements - which is the energy necessary to balance at all times the level of consumption and production in the electricity grid - are constantly growing. The reason? The current and future development of new renewable energies in Switzerland and Europe, among other factors.

The Cleuson-Dixence facilities are thus coming on stream at exactly the right time. With their 1200 megawatts of additional peak-time energy, they will make a vital contribution to the stability of the grid and to supply security. In this respect it is worth pointing out that hydroelectric power is of crucial importance in Switzerland, since it accounts for 56% of national production. It is an historic pillar of our electricity supply.

The re-commissioning of these facilities is also a major asset for our shareholders, who have always shown their confidence in us: they are Alpiq Suisse SA, Industrielle Werke Basel (IWB), BKW FMB Participations SA and Axpo AG.

Finally, the canton of Valais, Europe's hydroelectric lung, is also a key partner in Swiss hydroelectricity. It is in this canton that the potential for expanding hydroelectricity is greatest, with more than one billion kWh, that is, about one third of Switzerland's potential. All of which goes to show that the Valais's role is essential, as is that of its authorities, who have always supported us in our development and rehabilitation efforts. We take this opportunity to express our deepest gratitude to them.

However, this potential will not be sufficient to overcome the forecast electricity shortage. For the future, we therefore need to develop a diversified production mix.

Furthermore, the welcome production of these "super-peak" kilowatt hours means that they have to be distributed to the consumption centres by the very high-voltage grid. The isolation of the very high-voltage grid in the French-speaking part of the country from the national grid impairs the supply security of the regions concerned. The situation is particularly urgent in Valais, the present and future heart of hydroelectric production. The construction of the Chamoson-Chippis line is therefore a matter of vital importance for the future of our energy supply.

We are ready to take up all these challenges, together with our shareholders, our co-workers - who are more motivated than ever - and with the support of the municipal, cantonal and federal authorities. A big thank you to them all.

We have heard enough words, let us now see some images. I have pleasure in showing a short, 10-minute film that traces the exciting history of La Grande Dixence and the men who brought the project to life.

Thank you for your attention.