



Christoph Brand has been Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Axpo Group since 1 May 2020 and holds a degree in economics from the University of Bern. He also completed the Advanced Management Programme at INSEAD. Previously, he held various positions at TX Group (formerly Tamedia), was CEO of the software company Adcubum, CEO of the telecommunications company Sunrise, CEO at Bluewin and held leading positions at Swisscom.

“Many of our innovations aren’t sexy – but they’re effective”

Axpo CEO Christoph Brand is convinced that competition boosts innovation. In this interview, he explains what that means for Switzerland’s energy future.



My job is to create the ideal conditions for innovation to happen



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A glance at the newspapers shows that wind farms are under fire, we are contemplating a return to nuclear power, and a growing number of people believe that the Energy Strategy 2050 has failed. What is going wrong?

The discussion about our energy supply is going round in circles. Although we as a society have a common vision in the form of the Energy Strategy 2050, we are failing to implement it because there is no consensus on the measures needed to get there.

What do you suggest we do to move forward?

The time has come for an honest discussion about what is feasible – economically and physically. It is simply not true that we can meet our energy needs with water and sun alone: photovoltaics does not provide enough energy in winter, and hydropower has no meaningful additional potential in Switzerland, and it also fluctuates. Advancing climate change is likely to only exacerbate that. So anyone who rejects wind turbines must say yes to an alternative that supplies electricity during the cold season, such as nuclear or gas-fired power plants – or more imports.

Are new technologies also needed to shape Switzerland's energy future?

Not necessarily. We basically have all the technologies we need today to achieve our goals of decarbonisation, security of supply and affordability. However, there are conflicting goals among these three dimensions of the so-called energy trilemma. The optimum can be achieved through diversification across multiple technologies. While wind power is the second most important source of electricity in Europe, for example, it is almost completely absent in Switzerland.

What are the reasons for this?

Due to objections, ideologies, conflicts of interest and NIMBYism – the “not in my backyard” attitude – we are not making full use of the available technologies. This is certainly not only the case in Switzerland, but it is particularly pronounced here compared to other countries.

And politically, what course needs to be set for Switzerland to achieve its Energy Strategy 2050 goals?

In my view, integration into the European energy system is essential. We are being increasingly excluded – that must not be allowed to happen. An



First digital hydropower plant in Switzerland

With Hydro Digital, Axpo is making its hydroelectric power plants, some of which are over 100 years old, fit for the future. By implementing digital technologies the operation of the plants becomes safer and more efficient. Orders are processed via smartphone or tablet, while the collected data provides important information on wear and tear, maintenance requirements and the economically optimal time for a shutdown. Hydro Digital was launched in 2019 as a pilot project at the Sarganserland power plant site. Hydro Digital services, such as maintenance via drones (see picture below at the Limmern dam), are now available to all Axpo hydropower plants and external customers.

Axpo Holding AG was founded in 2001 and is based in Baden. Its shares are wholly owned by the cantons and cantonal utilities in north-eastern Switzerland. Axpo produces, distributes and sells electricity and is active in international energy trading and energy services.

