

He has left behind exceptional living conditions in Switzerland in order to do business in Romania, because business level creativity is more present here than in the Land of Cantons. He believes that in Romania, the food industry, agriculture, service sector, logistic, infrastructure works must be developed. He has found in Romania the purest water in the world and he wants to make this a strong, prestigious brand. He says that here, God helped him discover the only spring of water without nitrates, something that he saw as a challenge, so he began a fierce battle to have the [water law](#) changed. About all of these things, businessman Jean Valvis is speaking in an interview to Bucharest Herald.

BH: “Aqua Carpatica” that is competing right now with the brands Dorna, Poiana Negri and Izvorul Alb, that you created and then sold to Coca- Cola Hellenic. What are the most important advantages of this brand compared with the other brands you created and compared with the other mineral water brands on the Romanian market? What is this brand’s market share right now?

Jean Valvis: Right now I feel like a father who has two daughters. One of them got married, left far away and maybe she also had some plastic surgeries and now she is very changed. The other daughter is with me, I watch and raise her the best way I can and completely natural, without plastic surgeries. The three brands I owned are still strong, they have a high market share. But God has showed me another spring with a lower nitrate level and it was my duty to make the best of this opportunity.

I showed the audience a completely different mineral water and entered a free market segment, without any competition and from this point of view the brand extension is easier. On the other hand we are in competition with all the other mineral water bottlers in Romania and we are active on a rigid, crystallized market. Building the market share is more difficult right now because people are already emotionally attached to certain brands. But this reality is a challenge for us, that determines us to be more creative. The presence of the internet and of the social media channels gives us opportunity to understand the audience preferences.

We are not afraid of the competition, but we respect it. We are not afraid because we have a unique differentiating element: natural mineral water with 0 nitrates. The day when the consumers will understand what are the negative effects of the nitrates in drinking water, Aqua Carpatica will become the number one mineral water brand.

It is true that I was lucky to find this spring. And it is my duty to communicate this luck and show the consumer what pure water means.

BH: *What made you return to the mineral water business, after 10 years and what changes has this return from the dairy market to the water industry has brought into your business perspective?*

Jean Valvis: First of all the fact that the brand Dorna, that I sold, was not exported had an important role. Secondly the brand Dorna was my child, I consider it a member of my family. Ten years have passed since I sold it, in 2002 and I missed it. Thirdly I think I have a unique piece of jewellery in the world, I have a unique value in my hands. I would have been coward to know that I discovered something extremely rare and miss this challenge.

This is not a return from the dairy market to the water industry, it is a coherent psychological process. Each time I sold a brand, a business, I knew what was my next investment target. A sales action was not a benefit capitalization, but the premises for a new project.

When I accepted, in 1998, Societe Generale as a 20% shareholder of La Dorna, I knew I wanted to be a dairy producer. And this 20% stake basically founded the Dorna dairy company. When I sold in 2002 Dorna I knew I wanted to extend the cheese facilities with two units in Mihail Kogalniceanu and in Targu- Neamt.

When I sold the dairy brand La Dorna in 2008 I was already planning to invest in renewable energies, in biomass in Calarasi. Each time when I decide to make an exit, I plan the next operation. I don't sell to recover capital and sleep with it, I sell to reinvest in my future.

BH: *Do you have expansion plans for Panaci factory in Suceava county, with new production lines? Are you planning to build new production units in the near future?*

Jean Valvis: Panaci factory was designed to be extended 3 to 4 times. I am an architect

engineer and I asked for a design that allows the factory expansion. We will decide the expansion depending on the success the brand will have on the market.

We are not targeting other locations for expansion with new facilities. Panaci village is located at the outskirts of Vatra Dorna, it is a region with lots of springs, a blessed forest area.

BH: Have you thought about exporting Aqua Carpatica?

Jean Valvis: I wanted to bottle a mineral water exclusively for export. But my partner, Stelian Chiforescu, with whom I started in 1993 to build Dorna Apenin, came and told me: let's bottle a good water for internal consumption too. He is the man who convinced me that the water from this O nitrate spring, the purest spring in the world, cannot be exported exclusively to luxury restaurants abroad. And this is when I made a wrapping for Romanian consumers too.

I wanted to build an industrial operation for a unique product at world level and this vision was correct from the beginning. And I accepted to build a PET factory of plastic bottles for the Romanian market to.

BH: Which of the businesses in "Valvis Holding" portfolio proved to be the most profitable in 2011 and which one will have the best evolution this year, in your perspective?

Jean Valvis: In 2011 the investments in agriculture proved the most profitable. We were lucky that the cereal prices were very high. We invested masivly in Calarasi. We bought 30 tractors, we built the infrastructure, we opened the roads. I strongly believe in the future of Romania's agriculture sector. The agriculture sector is an competitive advantage of the country.

BH: So far you have created brands that you sold to multinational companies. Have you thought about the acquisition of one or several brands that you could resuscitate or reinvent? What is the most appealing industry?

Jean Valvis: I have two sons and I promised them that I will never sell Samburesti wines and the brand Aqua Carpatica. They will stay in the family and we will build them with pleasure and out of the pride of producing two premium brands.

Samburesti is a domain where the wine has been produced since Mihai Viteazul reign. This domain was successively taken over by all the country reigners. In the 19th century this domaine became Bratianu family property (state men and founders of the Liberal partie).

I have been involved in this business since 2006 and ever since then I started a rebranding and replanting process, as the old vine was either stolen or miscared and the production which should have reached 10 tonnes per ha, was, at that moment only one tonne per ha.

I am not planning to become one of the main players on the wine market, but I want to be one of the most important middle players. I only own 500 ha of land in Samburesti, there are vineyards that stretch over 3,000- 4,000 ha and I do not want to compete with them. I do not want to expand the domaine either. I want Valvis family to produce a high quality wine. This is also a hobby, not only a business.

All the brands in Valvis Holding portfolio are a challenge and a permanent effort of interactivity with the consumers. But there are two activities that represent the biggest challenges for me. One of them is the bottling of the purest mineral water in the world in glass bottle and exporting this water.

The second major challenge is the investment in renewable energies. Romania is dependent on foreign energy suppliers. It is abnormal for a country with 1.5 million ha of unfertile land not to have a biomass strategy. Romania can become thermic energy independent with only 300.000 ha of biomass culture.

I do not like to buy brands, I like to build brands from scratch. This way I can control their social life. A brand bears values, it has its social significance and its creator instils its DNA and values.

BH: Do you have information regarding the still and mineral water consumption per capita in Romania in 2011? Is their percentual decline or growth on the previous year?

Jean Valvis: In general the water consumption in the EU (27) reaches 150 liters per capita. In Romania the consumption is three times lower, around 55 liters per capita. There is room for the growth and development of this industry.

BH: How did you decide to move to Romania from Switzerland, a country where many Romanians would probably like to live? Have you considered the possibility to return to Greece or to Switzerland at some point?

Jean Valvis: Romania has been a developing democracy since 1990. The market is also developing and the growth possibilities, for investors, are higher than in other countries.

Switzerland is a crystallized country in terms of business, with fewer advantages for investors.

In Romania the food industry, the agriculture, the services sector, the logistics, the infrastructure works must be developed. In Switzerland the life level is very high, indeed. Silviu Brucan said that the development level of Switzerland is at least 20 years above Romania's development level. I believe that is more than 60. I abandoned the exceptional living conditions in Switzerland to take advantage of the business creativity which in Romania is more present than there.

I visit Greece and Switzerland 4 or 5 times per year. In Greece I have some projects in the renewable energy sector and I own a SPA center. My parents and grandparents are from Santorini, a beautiful island where I want to build a high quality resort with a agriculture production facility.

BH: Tell us, please, more things about the [water law](#) that you want to initiate.

Jean Valvis: Regarding the [water law](#) , my first dilemma was if I should brand this initiative or not. If I had branded it people would have thought that this is a commercial action. If I had not support it, people would have thought that this is masked advertising. So I decided to support this initiative and write below, with very small characters “project supported by Aqua Carpatica”. I did not want to give anyone the feeling that I am hiding behind this project and putting the non- profit organizations in the front line . Transparency is a constant value to us.

In agriculture the level of nitrates can reach 100 mg. The drinkable water law for cities stipulated a maximum quantity of 50 mg of nitrates per liter. According to the doctors' recommendations, the nitrate quantity in drinkable water should not exceed 10 mg per liter in the case of children. In other words the European law regarding the maximum quantity of nitrates in the drinkable water is extremely permissive in the case of children, babies and pregnant women. Once it has reached a child's blood, the nitrates block the hemoglobin that can no longer transport oxygen and the babies become blue- the “blue baby syndrome”.

It is unacceptable for a bottler not to declare the purty level of the water he is selling, considering that in Romania people drink water with over 10 mg of nitrates per liter. There was a law, until 2005, regarding the maximum nitrate quantity which should not exceed 10 mg, but some hidden lobby was performed and this law disapered from the Romanian legislation. The water bottlers do not have the obligation to write the quantity of nitrates on the labels and some of them do not even respect this 10 mg limit.

Jean Valvis: Am descoperit in Romania o bijuterie unica la nivel mondial - Apa minerala cu 0 nitrati !

A abandonat conditiile exceptionale de viata din Elvetia pentru a face afaceri in Romania, deoarece creativitatea la nivel de business este mai prezenta decat in Tara Cantoanelor. Considera ca in Romania industria alimentara, agricultura, sectorul serviciilor, logistica, lucrarile de infrastructura trebuie dezvoltate. A descoperit in Romania cea mai pura apa din lume, iar acest lucru vrea sa-l transforme intr-un brand puternic, de prestigiu. Spune ca aici, Dumnezeu l-a ajutat sa descopere singurul izvor cu apa fara nitrati, lucru pe care l-a simtit ca o provocare, astfel ca a inceput o puternica batalie pentru schimbarea legii apelor. Despre toate acestea, omul de afaceri Jean Valvis a decis sa vorbeasca intr-un interviu pentru Bucharest Herald.

BH: “Aqua Carpatica” este un brand care intra acum in competitie cu brandurile Dorna, Poiana Negri si Izvorul Alb, pe care le-ati creat si le-ati vandut ulterior catre Coca- Cola Hellenic. Care sunt cele mai importante avantaje ale acestui brand in raport cu celelalte branduri de apa minerala pe care le-ati creat si in raport cu celelate marci de apa minerala pe piata romaneasca? Ce cota de piata detine acest brand pe piata in acest moment?

Jean Valvis: Ma simt ca un tata care are doua fete. Una dintre ele s-a casatorit, a plecat foarte departe si eventual a facut si niste operatii estetice, iar acum este foarte schimbata. Cealalta fata este langa mine, o urmaresc si o cresc asa cum cred eu si absolut natural, fara operatii estetice. Cele trei branduri pe care le-am detinut sunt in continuare puternice, un market share mare. Dar Dumnezeu mi-a pus in cale un alt izvor care are mai putini nitrati si era datoria mea sa exploatez aceasta oportunitate.

Am propus publicului o apa plata complet diferita si am intrat pe un segment de piata neocupat, pe care nu exista competitie si din acest punct de vedere brandul este mai usor de extins. Pe de alta parte, insa, suntem in competitie cu toti imbuteliatorii de apa plata din Romania si activam pe o piata cristalizata, formata si mai rigida. Construirea unei cote de piata este mai dificila acum, pentru ca oamenii au deja un bagaj simbolic legat de anumite marci. Dar aceasta realitate este o provocare pentru noi, care ne determina sa fim mai creativi. Existenta internetului si a canalelor de comunicare sociala ne da posibilitatea sa intelegem preferintele publicului.

Nu ne temem de concurenta, dar o respectam. Nu ne temem pentru ca avem un element diferentiator unic: apa minerala natural carbogazoasa cu 0 nitrati. In ziua in care consumatorii vor intelege care sunt efectele negative ale prezentei nitratilor in apa de baut, Aqua Carpatica va deveni marca numarul 1.

Este adevarat ca este un noroc faptul ca am gasit acest izvor. Si este datoria mea sa comunic acest noroc si sa ii arat consumatorului ce inseamna apa pura.

BH: Ce v-a determinat sa reveniti la afacerile cu apa minerala, dupa 10 ani si ce schimbari a adus aceasta intoarcere de la piata lactatelor la industria apei, in viziunea dvs de afaceri?

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Jean Valvis: In primul rand, faptul ca brandul Dorna, pe care l-am vandut nu s-a exportat a avut un rol important. In al doilea rand, brandul Dorna era copilul meu., il consideram chiar membru al familiei mele. Au trecut 10 ani de cand l-am vandut, in 2002 si ii simteam lipsa. Iar in al treilea rand, consider ca am o bijuterie unica la nivel mondial, am o valoare unica in mana mea. Ar fi fost o dovada de lasitate din partea mea sa stiu ca am descoperit ceva unic, extraordinar de rar si sa nu raspund acestei provocari.

Nu este vorba de o intoarcere de la industria lactatelor la industria apei, ci este chiar un proces psihologic coerent. De fiecare data cand am vandut un brand, o afacere, am stiut in ce vreau sa investesc in viitor. O actiune de vanzare nu era o capitalizare a beneficiilor, ci avea ca premiza deja o viziune pentru urmatorul proiect.

Cand am acceptat in 1998, ca Societe Generale sa devina actionar cu 20%, al firmei La Dorna, stiam ca vreau sa fac lactate. Si aceasta participatie de 20% practic a fondat industria Dorna lactate. Cand am vandut in 2002 Dorna stiam ca vreau sa extind fabricile cu branzeturi cu fabrica de telemea de la Constanta, la Mihail Kogalniceanu, cu fabrica de cascaval la Targu- Neamt.

Cand am vandut in 2008 brandul de lactate, La Dorna avem deja planul de a investi in energii regenerabile, in biomasa la balta Calarasi. De fiecare data cand iau decizia de a face un exit, am in plan operatiunea pentru viitor. Nu vand pentru a recupera un capital si a dormi cu el, vand pentru a investi in viitorul meu.

BH: Aveti planuri de extindere a fabricii din comuna Panaci, judetul Suceava, cu noi linii de productie? Intentionati sa construiti fabrici noi in viitorul apropiat?

Jean Valvis: Fabrica de la Panaci este proiectata pentru a fi extinsa de 3-4 ori. Sunt inginer arhitect si am dispus planul functiunilor astfel incat fabrica sa poata fi extinsa. In functie de succesul pe care il va avea brandul pe piata, vom decide extinderea fabricii.

Nu vizam alte locatii, pentru deschiderea altor fabrici. Zona Panaci, comuna Coverca, este o zona la periferia Vatrei Dorna, este o regiune cu multe izvoare, extrem de neprihanita de activitatea umana. Este o zona naturala forestiera binecuvantata.

BH: V-ati gandit la posibilitatea de a exporta apa Aqua Carpatica?

Jean Valvis: Eu am vrut sa imbuteliez o apa minerala care sa fie exclusiv pentru export. Dar partenerul meu, Stelian Chiforescu, cu care am inceput in 1993 sa construiesc Dorna Apenin a venit si mi-a spus: hai sa imbuteliem o apa buna si pentru piata interna. El este omul care m-a convins ca apa din acest izvor cu 0 nitrati, cel mai pur izvor din lume, nu poate sa mearga numai la restaurante de lux in strainatate. Si atunci am facut un ambalaj si pentru consumatorii din Romania.

Am vrut sa construiesc o operatiune industriala pentru un produs unic la nivel mondial, iar aceasta viziune a fost corecta de la inceput. Si am acceptat sa fac si o fabrica de PET-uri pentru Romania.

BH: Care dintre afacerile din portofoliul "Valvis Holding" s-a dovedit cea mai profitabila in 2011 si care considerati ca va avea cea mai buna evolutie anul acesta?

Jean Valvis: In 2011 cele mai profitabile s-au dovedit investitiile in agricultura. Am avut noroc ca preturile cerealelor au fost foarte sus. Am investit masiv in balta de langa Calarasi. Am cumparat 30 de tractoare, am facut lucrarile de infrastructura, am deschis drumurile. Cred cu tarie in viitorul agricol al Romaniei. Activitatea agricola este un atu al tarii .

BH: Pana in prezent ati construit branduri pe care le-ati vandut catre multinationale. V-ati gandit si la achizitia unuia sau mai multor branduri pe care sa le resuscitati sau sa le reinventati? Care este industria care va tenteaza cel mai mult?

Jean Valvis: Eu am doi baieti si le-am promis ca nu voi vinde niciodata vinurile de Samburesti si brandul Aqua Carpatica. Ele vor ramane in familie si le vom construi de placere si din mandria de a face doua produse premium.

Samburesti era un domeniu unde se facea vin inca de pe vremea lui Mihai Viteazul. Acest

domeniu a fost preluat succesiv de catre toti conducatorii tarii. In sec XIX acest domeniu a devenit conacul familiei Bratianu. (fondatorul partidului National Liberal)

Din 2006 am fost implicat in aceasta afacere si de atunci a inceput un proces de rebranding si replantare pentru ca veche vita de vie era ori furata ori neingrijita si productia pe ha, care ar fi trebuit sa ajunga la 10 tone, era in acel moment de doar o tona.

Nu mi-am propus sa fiu unul dintre principalii jucatori pe piata vinurilor, dar vreau sa fiu unul dintre cei mai importanti jucatori de mijloc. Eu detin doar 500 de ha de pamant la Samburesti, sunt podgorii care au 3.000- 4.000 de ha si nu vreau sa intru in competitie cu ei. Nici nu vreau sa ma extind. Vreau vin de calitate, produs de familia Valvis. Este si un hobby, nu numai un business.

Toate brandurile din portofoliul Valvis Holding reprezinta o provocare si un efort permanent de interactivitate cu consumatorii. Exista totusi doua activitati care reprezinta cele mai mari provocari: una este imbutelierea celei mai pure ape minerale din lume in sticla de sticla si exportul ei.

Nu imi place sa achizitionez, imi place sa construiesc branduri de la zero. In felul acesta le si controlez viata sociala. Un brand este un purtator de valori, are semnificatia lui in social, iar creatorul lui ii insufla AND-ul.

A doua provocare majora este investitia in energiile regenerabile. Romania este dependenta termic de furnizori de energie straini. Nu este normal ca o tara care are atata teren care nu este propice pentru productia de cereale, fructe si legume, respectiv 1,5 milioane de hectare de parloaga, sa nu aiba o strategie pentru productia de biomasa. Cu doar 300.000 ha de teren cultivate cu biomasa Romania isi poate obtine independenta energetica.

BH: Aveti informatii referitoare la consumul de apa plata si consumul de apa minerala pe cap de locuitor in Romania in 2011? Exista scaderi sau cresteri procentuale comparativ cu anul anterior?

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Jean Valvis: In general consumul anual de apa plata in UE (27) este la 150 litri per capita. In Romania consumul este de trei ori mai mic, respectiv 55 de litri per capita. Exista loc de crestere si de dezvoltare a acestei industrii.

BH: Care sunt motivele pentru care ati decis sa va mutati in Romania din Elvetia, tara in care foarte multi romani si straini si-ar dori sa traiasca? V-ati gandit la posibilitatea de a va intoarce in Grecia sau in Elvetia la un moment dat?

Jean Valvis: Din 1990 si pana astazi, Romania este o democratie in devenire. Si piata este in devenire, iar posibilitatile de crestere, pentru investitori sunt mai mari decat in alte tari.

Elvetia este o tara cristalizata din punct de vedere al afacerilor, cu mai putine avantaje pentru investitori.

In Romania industria alimentara, agricultura, sectorul serviciilor, logistica, lucrarile de infrastructura trebuie dezvoltate. In Elvetia se traieste foarte bine, intra- adevar. Silviu Brucan spunea ca nivelul de dezvoltare al Elvetiei este cu cel putin 20 de ani peste nivelul de dezvoltare al Romaniei. Eu cred ca acesta este de 60 de ani. Eu am abandonat conditiile exceptionale de viata din Elvetia, pentru a profita de creativitatea la nivel de business care in Romania este mai prezenta decat acolo.

In Grecia si in Elvetia merg de 4-5 ori pe an. In Grecia am niste proiecte tot in domeniul energiilor regenerabile si un centru SPA. Parintii si buncii mei sunt originari din Santorini, o insula superba si vreau sa construiesc acolo o mica unitate de agro-turism de foarte inalta calitate.

BH: Povestiti-ne mai multe lucruri despre [legea apei](#) , pe care doriti sa o initiati.

Jean Valvis: In ceea ce priveste [legea apei](#) , prima mea dilema a fost daca trebuie sa branduiesc aceasta initiativa sau nu. Daca as fi branduit-o lumea ar fi spus ca este un demers comercial si ca imi fac reclama. Daca nu as fi branduit-o tot s-ar fi spus ca imi fac reclama mascata. Asa ca am luat decizia sa branduiesc aceasta initiativa si sa scriu jos foarte mic “

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proiect sustinut de Aqua Carpatica”. Sa nu dau cuiva senzatia ca ma ascund in spatele acestui proiect si pun in fata niste organizatii non- guvernamentale. Transparenta este cea care ne caracterizeaza.

In agricultura nitratii pot ajunge pana la 100 mg. Normativul pentru apa potabila din orase prevede o cantitate maxima de nitrati, de 50 mg. Potrivit recomandarilor medicilor, cantitate de nitrati din apa potabila nu trebuie sa depaseasca 10, in cazul copiilor. Cu alte cuvinte legea europeana referitoare la cantitatea maxima de nitrati in apa potabil, este extrem de permisiva in cazul copiilor, bebelusilor si femeilor insarcinate. In cazul copiilor, ajuns in sange nitratul se transforma in nitrit, blocheaza hemoglobina, aceasta nu mai poate sa transporte oxigen, iar corpul bebelusului nu se mai oxigeneaza si prezinta sindromul “baby blue” (bebelus albastru).

Consider ca este total inadmisibil ca, in conditiile in care in Romania se consuma apa cu peste 10 mg de nitrati, ca imbuteliatorii sa nu declare gradul de puritate al apei pe care o vand. Pana in 2005 a exista legea referitoare la cantitatea maxima de nitrati de 10 mg, dar s-a facut un lobby ascuns ca aceasta lege sa dispara din legislatia romaneasca. Imbuteliatorii de apa nu au obligatia de a scrie pe eticheta cantitatea de nitrati din apa pe care o comercializeaza, iar unii dintre ei nici nu respecta aceasta limita de 10 mg.