



Inauguration event of the Gotthard railway tunnel opening in Switzerland, Embassy of Switzerland in New Delhi, 1st June 2016

Address by H.E. Dr. Linus von Castelmur, Ambassador of Switzerland to India and Bhutan

Honorable Minister of Railways Suresh Prabhu

Distinguished representatives of the Indian Authorities,

Excellencies, dear colleagues from other Embassies,

Distinguished key note speakers,

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

1. Today is a special day for Switzerland. After a construction period of 17 years, we celebrate the opening of the world's longest railway tunnel: the Gotthard. It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you tonight, to celebrate the inauguration here in Delhi, and simultaneously in the Swiss Consulates General in Mumbai and Bangalore.

This afternoon, on the day of the opening in Switzerland, 1000 Swiss citizens were the first ones to travel, at the speed of 250 kilometres per hour, through the tunnel on two trains. Even before high-ranking state guests as well as members of government and members of parliament, the first travellers were normal citizens. This gesture carries symbolic significance. It is not only the pioneering spirit of engineers, it is not only the long-term vision of politicians which stand behind this once-in-a-century project. Also the Swiss citizens have, in several referenda, expressed their approval of and longing for the project. In that sense, giving the population the first ride at today's opening can be seen as a way of valuing their enduring support and of showing that this gigantic project is first and foremost for common citizens.

Switzerland has a long-lasting railway tradition. Starting in the 19th century, the Swiss railway system continues to be, until today, an integral component of our mobility landscape and an essential part of

our identity. Considering this, I am even prouder to say that the Gotthard railway project reflects several features Switzerland stands for: innovation and precision, reliability, finest engineering and sustainability put into practice.

The 57 km long Gotthard is the centrepiece of the New Rail Link through the Alps, comprising a total of three tunnels; The 35 km long Lötschberg, which was opened in 2007, the Gotthard and the 15 km long Monte Ceneri, due to be completed in 2020. Not only does the Gotthard railway tunnel constitute an engineering masterpiece, but it also represents an important milestone for Switzerland's and Europe's transport networks. The overarching goals of the project are clear: the protection of the alpine environment and the gradual shift of traffic away from congested roads and onto the rail. Transport capacity across the Alps will increase considerably, but the new railway tunnel will also provide a faster connection between the canton of Ticino and Northern Switzerland. Similarly, European mobility will be improved through the increasing and speeding up of public transport networks between North and South.

2. Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to continue by making three points on the political dimensions of the new Gotthard railway tunnel.
3. First and foremost, we do not celebrate the opening of the Gotthard tunnel in isolation from its **broader national context**. The construction of the Gotthard in the heart of the Alps is a true testimony of Switzerland's progressive and sustainable transport policies. It will not only enhance the attractiveness of transalpine freight and passenger traffic, but at the same time, it will also help foster the national cohesion of our country.
4. Secondly, we should draw our attention to the **regional significance** of the project and its implications in a European context. The Gotthard railway tunnel constitutes an important part of pan-European transport policies, the backbone of the European single market. These policies are developed and implemented by our friends from the EU and Switzerland along the Rotterdam-Genova trade corridor. Switzerland, as a non-member but close partner of the European Union, is willing and able to contribute to transnational European projects and to operate as a proactive driver of European innovation. The Gotthard railway tunnel – it comes at a price tag of more than 13 billion USD – has been entirely financed through Swiss public funds, yet another sign of our solidarity towards our Europe.

5. Obviously, the significance of this project is transcending the European continent. Also from a **global perspective** this project is highly relevant to many countries. It is time now to turn towards India! Not only does India have a long-lasting rail history as does Switzerland, but also the gradual shift from road to rail is of similar importance for India as it is for Switzerland. Especially in the areas of transport of goods and passengers, India is pursuing railway projects such as freight-corridors between economic hubs, metro-projects in major cities and the construction of high-speed train tracks.

It is essential to stress that we celebrate the Gotthard tunnel opening not only to salute a Swiss project, but especially also with the aim to spark off innovative ideas for new bilateral cooperation between Switzerland and India. The know-how used and acquired by the construction of the pioneer-project Gotthard forms a strong basis for further cooperation in the area of smart transport infrastructure or railway engineering. Convinced of the mutual benefits for both countries, Switzerland is eager to partner with India in the area of innovation and technology and will continue to promote the expansion and consolidation of Indo-Swiss cooperation.

6. To conclude, as we know: There is always light at the end of the tunnel, even if the tunnel is 57 km long! Today, stepping out into the light, we look back over our shoulders all the way to the entrance. And we thank the 2'400 engineers and workers who put their visions, their energy and passion into the construction of this engineering masterpiece.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have done our best to bring the Gotthard tunnel, its historical path and future significance, as close to you as possible, through film projections, speeches and a leaflet with all the most important facts.

I would like to thank you all again for attending this historic event. It is a pleasure having you all with us tonight to celebrate this most important day for Switzerland! I am convinced that you will thoroughly enjoy the evening.

Thank you.