

Esteemed Swiss and Indian experts,

Dear students, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

Should you have searched for my last tweet, you would have done so in vain. Unlike Prime Minister Modi and many ministers of the Indian government, I am not on twitter. You can find me on the Embassy's Facebook page, where my team posts photos and video statements. I recently learned that Prime Minister Modi is the second most followed politician in the world, right after the US President. The twitter diplomacy of the Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj is also setting new standards on how governments and citizens speak directly to each other.

I am well aware that the way governments and citizens are interacting is changing, as well as the way our countries are governed. With this, many extremely complex questions are arising and challenging our knowhow, including questions about the role of the State. The Swiss Federal Chancellor recently formulated a few such questions: what should the State ensure, what should it regulate? How should the State exactly shape and structure such regulation? What should it promote? What should it protect? And how should this protection look? What should the State punish, for what is it to be held liable?

The Chancellor remembered the words of New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman, who, in a conference in the Swiss capital Bern a few years ago, said that for consumers digitalization is wonderful, great and cheap – but for leaders, for any leader, it will be difficult and heavy.

The questions posed are challenging, the stakes high, the tasks for governments immense – therefore, international coordination and learning from each other are key. Governments around the globe know very well that this far-reaching transformation process cannot be handled in a national framework only and on their own.

Just a few days ago, 32 EU and EFTA countries, among them Switzerland, signed a declaration on e-Government, containing five core guiding principles. The so called Tallinn Declaration on e-Government lays a common foundation towards advancing the digitalization of public administrations, at the national and international levels. A few examples: service processes in administrations should be conducted digitally as far as possible and be available to all. Data entry for citizens and companies should be reliable, secure and only have to be carried out once. Efforts should be made for IT systems to be compatible nationally and internationally.

The Swiss e-Government Strategy was built from the very beginning along the lines of international standards and guidelines. The Swiss speakers at today's event will tell you more about its content and implementation. At the heart of the strategy lays the following: to make consistent use of the opportunities of digitalization so that Switzerland can position itself as an attractive place to live and as an innovative, future-oriented location for business and research. I'm sure Indian efforts are heading into the same direction and look forward to today's occasion to compare measures, experiences and intermediary results.

User- and citizen-friendliness of e-government services will be a key factor. Since 2010, the so-called e-Government Monitor Study has been examining how the general public assesses official online offerings in Germany, Austria and

Switzerland. Last week, the latest findings of the Monitor Study were published. They show a high degree of satisfaction with the Swiss administration's online services. Since 2012 the use of e-Government services in my country has risen slightly to 61%. The study explains this increase with savings in terms of time and costs while dealing with the authorities. The usage barriers observed in earlier studies – mainly the fact that the services are not widely known and their lack of consistency - were lower compared to the previous year. We are thus hopefully on the right track.

However, much remains to be done. It will be indispensable to have every step accompanied from a scientific point of view and by robust research work. For a layman such as myself, who sometimes feels a bit lost in the vast world of digitalization, it is always reassuring to read a piece of research on a very concrete and graphic example of public e-services. I recently came across the project of an empirical study by young researchers of the University of Lausanne and the University of Applied Sciences of Western Switzerland: They are looking into the impact of digitalization on the management of administrative procedures – and have chosen the case of building permits in three Swiss Cantons, Geneva, Neuchatel and Valais. The study is still ongoing and I look forward to seeing the final results. Building permits are a hot topic everywhere in the world when it comes to improving the efficiency of public services; so we might consider bringing these young researchers to India in order to discuss their findings with interested Indian interlocutors.

But let's not get too far ahead. It is my pleasure to open today's discussions between Indian and Swiss experts - and the audience. My warmest "thank you" goes to our partners from the Indian Institute of Public Administration, who, together with the Public diplomacy branch of the Embassy and swissnex India, have worked tirelessly to make this forum possible.

We are currently marking 70 years of Swiss-Indian friendship with a series of events. The general motto we have chosen is “Connecting minds – inspiring the future”. It is in this amicable and forward looking spirit that we are gathered today. I wish us all fruitful discussions and stimulating discoveries.