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The spoken word is final!

Opening of the Gotthard base tunnel

Welcoming speech by President of the Swiss Confederation, Johann N. Schneider-Ammann and discussion between President of the Swiss Confederation, Johann N. Schneider-Ammann and Federal Councillor Doris Leuthard

Rynächt/Pollegio, 1 June 2016

President of the Swiss Confederation, Johann N. Schneider-Ammann:

Monsieur le Président,
Frau Bundeskanzlerin,
Herr Regierungschef,
Signor Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri,
Herr Bundeskanzler,
Exzellenzen,
Sehr geehrte Mitglieder der Eidgenössischen Räte
Sehr geehrte Repräsentanten der Kantone und Gemeinden
Ladies and gentlemen, friends

Today is an historic day for our country: We have completed the Gotthard Base Tunnel, an epic feat of engineering, a project that has involved generations, from the first sketches, to the planning and construction of the tunnel. I feel extremely proud, but also quite humble. For a project like this does not succeed as a matter of course. On behalf of the Federal Council, I wish to thank most sincerely everyone who has contributed to this success.

Today we are writing a new chapter in the history of the Gotthard, and the proof lies in this new tunnel: The opening of the first rail tunnel in 1882 was a landmark, and the spirit of enterprise has borne fruit after years of hard work, and so today we mark a new milestone by inaugurating the Gotthard base tunnel. For it is here, in the Alps where the Reuss, the Rhine, the Rhone and the Ticino rise, that languages and cultures, trade routes and economic zones meet. You can see why the Gotthard has always been vitally important. The base tunnel provides us with a faster link through the Alps, and brings North and South even closer together.

This is an important step for Switzerland, and equally for our neighbours and the rest of the continent. People and goods can travel more quickly. Cities like Stuttgart, Zurich, Lugano and Milan are better linked.

The Gotthard Base Tunnel helps us bring people and business communities together – the construction project of the century echoes the pioneering achievements of our forebears!

The Gotthard Base Tunnel, which we celebrate today, is the longest structure of its type in the world. And it sends a strong signal far beyond our country's borders: In Switzerland, and in Europe, epic achievements are still possible. The twenty-first century



may yet belong to Europe!

In 1882, the opening of the very first Gotthard tunnel was also celebrated north and south of the Alps. Even back then, representatives of the neighbouring states were present.

Even back then, the Saint Gotthard axis was of international importance. I am therefore delighted that today we can also celebrate the opening of the tunnel in the presence of guests from north and south of the Alps.

On behalf of the Swiss Federal Council, I welcome you very warmly to the opening of the Gotthard Base Tunnel.

I will now hand over to my fellow Federal Councillor, Doris Leuthard, who is at the southern festival site ...

Federal Councillor Doris Leuthard:

Thank you. I would also like to extend a warm welcome to you all. I am delighted to be taking part in this opening ceremony, along with our other guests – here in Ticino, the Italian-speaking part of our country.

The Gotthard is hugely important to us all and to Ticino. For a long time, because of the dangers posed by the mountain pass, this route was more of a dividing line than one that provided a link. And even if the farmers and traders on either side maintained close and friendly relations, the mountain continued to be an obstacle to many. Crossing the mountain pass by carriage was an adventure, as the many hairpin bends in the Tremola road remind us. The first railway tunnel changed all of this overnight, and now the distance between Ticino and Central Switzerland, between the Italian and German languages and cultures, between northern and southern Europe, has been reduced even further.

The new tunnel is much more than a transport route, more than an amazing feat of engineering – it is also a symbol of openness and progress!

- We are linking different languages and cultures.
- We are linking people from the North Sea to the Mediterranean.
- We are strengthening cohesion – both in Switzerland and in Europe.
- We are giving a boost to our economic area.

This openness brings new opportunities for us all.

This openness has made Switzerland great.

This openness is something the Federal Council hopes to have in future, too!

Only in this way, with a pioneering spirit and determination, can we progress.

President of the Swiss Confederation, Johann N. Schneider-Ammann:

The new tunnel is part of the European rail freight corridor linking Rotterdam and Genoa. It extends capacity along the whole of the axis and at these two major ports. Besides the time gains, a greater volume of goods can be transported across the Alps. Our society is becoming increasingly digitalised, but the flow of goods is going to continue to increase rather than diminish. Now is the time to seize the opportunity offered by this feat of engineering!



Good transport routes are vital to a prosperous economy. Good transport routes are a prerequisite for competitiveness and jobs. And good transport routes help to overcome borders – in Switzerland as in Europe.

Federal Councillor Doris Leuthard:

The Gotthard base tunnel also provides new impetus to our transport policy. We can now transfer even more goods from road to rail. As soon as the Ceneri base tunnel is completed in 2020, and we can benefit in full from the flat link, the railway will become considerably more attractive. Over long distances, freight should be transported by rail – for the good of the Alps, nature and the public. I am delighted to see that European transport policy is also taking these things on board. For we are counting on progress being made on the access routes soon, as agreed.

The Gotthard is also European, if we consider who has participated in the construction of this mammoth feat of engineering: from Scandinavia to Sicily, and from Portugal to Poland, people from more than a dozen countries have helped to build it.

We extend our warmest thanks to them for their extraordinary achievement!

President of the Swiss Confederation, Johann N. Schneider-Ammann:

We can now celebrate the successful completion of the tunnel together. I hope you all have an enjoyable day. In a moment I will give the signal for the two inauguration trains to start.

May all the trains that pass through the longest tunnel in the world over the next 100 years arrive safely and on time! Make way for the trains! Place aux trains ! Via libra per ils trens! Via libera ai treni!