

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Keynote Welcome Speech

by

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on

**The importance of sustainable inland
transport in the economy and world politics**

**On the occasion of the
seventieth anniversary of the Inland Transport Committee
Past and Future of the UNECE Inland Transport Committee
21 February 2017
Salle XVII, 10.00 - 18.00**



Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of Switzerland, the country that has proudly hosted the Inland Transport Committee since its creation in 1947, it is an honour to address this high-level body on the committee's seventieth anniversary. In this regard, I have the privilege to deliver the keynote speech on behalf of the President of the Swiss Confederation, *Ms. Doris Leuthard*. Unfortunately, she is not able to be here today due to her presidential commitments, but she sends her warmest greetings and best wishes for a successful meeting and fruitful debates.

The title of my speech is "The importance of sustainable inland transport in the economy and world politics". With this topic, two questions come to mind:

- Why is this anniversary important?
- And, why is it important for Switzerland?

To answer the first question, **Why is this anniversary important?** I would like to focus on four reasons.

1. The ITC is the centre of United Nations Conventions

The first reason is the importance of the Committee itself. Since its establishment in 1947 the Inland Transport Committee of UNECE has championed international cooperation by providing a platform where Governments and key economic players come together to agree on international rules and standards. Rules and standards aim to make transport cleaner, safer, more sustainable and more efficient, thereby helping economies to grow and societies to be more inclusive.

In its seventy years of existence, the Inland Transport Committee has evolved into a **global** centre of United Nations Inland Transport Conventions. This can be seen by the fact that roughly 60 per cent of the ITC-administered legal instruments in force have Contracting Parties beyond the ECE region. This can also be seen by the number of delegations from around the world present here today, showing the global importance and impact of the Inland Transport Committee.

In this light, I look forward to the discussions this afternoon in Panel III on ITC as the centre of UN transport conventions.

2. The Challenges for the international community

This anniversary is taking place at a time of profound changes, challenges and opportunities of both a global and a regional nature. So, I would like to emphasize the economic and political challenges emerging internationally.

From a political standpoint, **the euphoria of the 1990s and first decade of the new millennium has been replaced by uncertainties.** As those who work in the real economy can attest, **political uncertainty is never good for the economy or for the investment climate as a whole.**

Which brings me to the economic standpoint. Recent data from the IMF and the OECD suggest that the global economic landscape may lead to a somewhat greater growth momentum in 2017 for a number of important economies. At best, **global growth can rise to 3.4 per cent in 2017, to perhaps 3.6 in 2018, from a rate of 3.1 in 2016.** However, at the same time, a wider dispersion of risks to this short-term forecast confirm a rising uncertainty.

What is the role of transport, and particularly, inland transport in the broader narrative? For us, **transport is a key economic sector in its own right** that provides access to markets and supply chains for exports and imports. As such, **it is vital to economic growth and in turn to alleviating poverty and promoting sustainable development.**

Since its establishment, ITC has sought to facilitate the international movement of persons and goods by inland transport modes. The ITC has contributed to improving the economics competitiveness. It has done so primarily by ensuring that it has remained at the forefront of transport developments and technological developments, which improve efficiency and connectivity.

Examples include uniform and simplified border-crossing procedures, road safety, and the development and revising of regulations on vehicle construction, and the transport of dangerous goods. Instruments such as the *European agreement concerning the international carriage of dangerous goods by road* (the ADR) and the respective regulations for rail (the RID) are highly appreciated by Switzerland's transport sector. The regulations help prevent accidents and damage to the environment. *Harmonized Vehicle Regulations* are also crucial in promoting efficient vehicle production and preventing road-related injuries. Clearly, when regulations differ, manufacturers need to invest considerable resources to understanding the rules and tailoring their merchandise accordingly. ITC has also been part of the pioneering work on developing legislation on the construction of sound transport infrastructure and reliable services. These provides a vital framework for enhancing productivity, national economic growth, competitiveness, and quality of life.

And placing this into a broader context, **the history of transport diplomacy, and the history of ITC, show that this Committee has been the meeting place for multilateral discussions in difficult international relations thereby helping to ensure that people and cargo move across borders.** Through its perseverance, the Committee also laid the foundations for the international regulatory architecture governing inland transport. **This is a very important message that needs to reach our capitals in this particularly historic moment! Here, I encourage you to visit the exhibit in the Salle des Pas Perdus just outside to see how the history of the world has evolved over the last 70 years, and how ITC and the wider transport community fit into this picture.**

3. Opportunities for the international community

Since 2015, the world has united to adopt a set of unprecedented global initiatives and agreements – among the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals*, the *Addis Ababa Action Agenda* of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, and the *Paris Agreement* in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. I also add the New Urban Agenda evolving from Habitat III of last year. These initiatives aspire to help humanity to revert to a virtuous path of sustainability. There is indeed mounting evidence that the planet we live on is ill and needs to be treated.

The inclusion of the explicit reference to transport-related issues in various *Sustainable Development Goals* reflects the undeniable relevance of transport for sustainable development. Sustainable transport is crucial in ending poverty (through access to markets and jobs), in improving education (by enabling access to schools), in

protecting child and maternal health (by ensuring access to medical services), and in enhancing environmental sustainability and traffic safety.

The Inland Transport Committee is the only United Nations body to comprehensively cover all modes of inland transport and, as such, contribute to meeting the expected *Sustainable Development Goals*.

So where do the opportunities lie? The opportunities lie in harnessing the best practices and activities of the ITC to achieve these Goals. With the work of the ITC touching on 14 of the 17 Goals, the possibilities at our disposal to help treat the planet are overwhelming. The ITC already undertakes key activities in improving the environmental impact of road vehicles and inland waterways. It is at the forefront of road safety activities and is breaking down barriers through such activities as those related to unified railway law.

All these activities make the ITC fundamental in facilitating connectivity and I expect that the speakers in panel I this morning will go into more detail on this.

4. The promise of the future – innovation and new technologies and the urgent need to harness their full potential

We find ourselves in an age of far-reaching and rapid transformation, due to the unprecedented pace of innovation and technological breakthroughs that blur the lines of the physical, digital and biological realms. Transport is at the heart of many of these developments. Intelligent Transport Systems or ITS and communication technologies connect infrastructure, vehicles, and users, thereby optimizing traffic and mobility management. The link between mobile phones and mobility has already resulted in new types of services and

the creation of new business opportunities – just think of car sharing, or passenger information systems.

Transport innovations can significantly enhance intermodality, by providing the platform for interfaces between different modes of transport. In cities around the world, ITS have a particular role to play as they have the ability to revolutionize mobility, changing everything about the way people move. For example, there are numerous potential benefits of vehicle automation, ranging from enhanced safety to a reduced environmental footprint and the expansion of boundaries to allow more people to enjoy individual mobility. The self-driving bus that steers its way around in the Palais des Nations, which I hope you all took to get there this morning, is a prime example.

However, deploying these solutions nationally and internationally is not a linear exercise and much remains to be understood about the challenges, limitations and likely advantages. Obstacles such as data collection, access to financing, and interoperability may delay or derail the effective use of otherwise ingenious technological advances. This is why international harmonization plays such an important role in shaping the future of mobility and the transport sector. **The significant benefits can only be reaped if ITS solutions are put in place in an internationally harmonized way, covering the regulatory framework and the basic characteristics of its implementation.** The world community does not need to go through a new era of regulatory competition.

In this context, this seventieth anniversary is significant: it affirms the strategic role of the ITC and its subsidiary bodies in facilitating and accelerating the pace at which innovations in infrastructure, vehicles and mobility management are introduced. Innovations will make mobility

safer, more efficient and more environmentally friendly. As such, the Committee is tantamount to being a public good at the service of the international community of sovereign nations.

I look forward to hearing how technology for sustainable mobility, discussed in the second panel, will help us towards a brighter future for transport.

Let us now move on to the second question I wish to address:

Why is this anniversary important for Switzerland? ... as a country and as the host country.

To better illustrate the point, I present you with paradox, the two sides of a coin that largely defines our choices as a nation:

Switzerland lies at the heart of Europe that can be understood in a number of ways, but for today's purposes, it is strictly geographical. **Switzerland is a landlocked country.** Switzerland is blessed with beautiful mountains, though these can be a barrier in terms of mobility.

At the same time, the Swiss economy is **export-oriented**. Swiss exports of goods and services in 2016 represented about 60% of GDP.

So, **being landlocked and export oriented** can be a paradox. Being landlocked creates economic handicaps. It is no coincidence that the majority of landlocked countries face major difficulties in reaching their markets and that **9 of the 12 countries with the lowest Human Development Indices are landlocked.**

Not all landlocked countries fit this mould, for example, Switzerland, Luxembourg, and Austria. How can we explain this paradox? Why are some economies able to overcome the economic disadvantages of being

landlocked and even be labelled as “export-oriented”, **a label that surely requires connectivity and market access?**

I suggest that one answer could be connectivity. To overcome these barriers and to reach the United Nations’ sustainable development goals, Switzerland has made continual efforts to increase its transport capacity and to modernize its railway network. After the *Lötschberg* base tunnel was opened in 2007, the *Gotthard Base tunnel* came into operation in December 2016 and the *Ceneri* is expected to come online in 2020. These new tunnels are part of the European Rhine-Alpine rail freight corridor from Rotterdam to Genoa. It expands capacity along the length of the route and at these two major ports. As well as the time gains, a greater volume of goods can be transported across the Alps. Switzerland is also blessed with excellent connections to its neighbouring countries. As a nation, we have always worked hard and invested extensively to create, renew and maintain these connections and I believe this is a fundamental factor in our success. The fact that we are a contracting Party to 34 of the United Nations Transport Conventions and Agreements, and signatory to another 8 has been a major contributing factor.

Given the political and economic importance of transport and Switzerland's policy towards ensuring connectivity in Europe in an environmentally sustainable way, it is no wonder that we cherish our role as the host of the Inland Transport Committee. In more tangible ways, through the pillar of transport, Switzerland has achieved effective results in mega projects, such as the Gotthard tunnel, that have transformed the economic map of Europe.

With its foreign policy, Switzerland seeks to contribute to alleviate poverty and suffering in the world, to encourage respect for human rights

and to promote democracy and peace as well as the conservation of natural resources. This can only be achieved by promoting and ensuring access and connectivity, something for which **transport and inland transport are a sine-qua-non!**

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are at the dawn of a new era for international and domestic transport and mobility. Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has begun, and transport mobility and the international governance of inland transport, are rooted in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

At this historic juncture, celebrating the seventieth anniversary of the Inland Transport Committee is more than a ceremonial gathering of transport leaders and senior politicians – it is an opportunity to reaffirm our role as governments, as a bold actor in international economic and political affairs, and as **the centre of international, institutional and regulatory architecture on inland transport.**

The proceedings today will end with the adoption and signing of the ministerial resolution on “Embracing the new era for sustainable inland transport and mobility”.

With this resolution we collectively affirm the place of the Committee **in creating a better and safer world** and in advancing the Sustainable Development Agenda, **(and I quote from the resolution): “[Underline] the uniqueness of the Committee within the United Nations system as an intergovernmental body with the capacity to transform inland transport globally”.**

Thank you!
