

Beyond Permits:

Securing the License to Operate for German Industrial Investments in India

Why the real risks to large-scale investment are social, political, and reputational.

Why they must be managed before the permits are signed.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Investing in India is no longer primarily financial, it has become a geopolitical necessity. Supply chain diversification, reduced dependency on single markets, a Germany-India relationship that has shifted to active partnership, and an EU-India trade framework that is moving fast. But the criteria that determine whether a project actually succeeds have changed as well. Technical and legal soundness remain necessary. What has shifted is that social, political, and reputational factors now carry equal weight, and require a different set of tools which few project teams are currently set up to manage.

This paper argues that securing the License to Operate (LTO) is the variable that often determines whether an otherwise technically, legally, and financially sound investment can actually succeed in India. LTO is not a document or a legal permit. It is the quiet, day-to-day backing of every key player who has the power to greenlight or derail a project. It can be lost quietly, through accumulated failures of communication and engagement, long before any formal opposition emerges, and long before the financial cost of that loss becomes visible on a balance sheet.

What this paper covers:

- From Social License to Operate to Regulatory Requirement.
- Why non-technical risks hit large, high-profile industrial projects hardest.
- Why License to Operate has a direct financial value, and how delay exposure can be quantified.
- How License to Operate differs from legal permissions, and what it looks like in practice.
- The four most common blind spots of companies investing in complex industrial markets.
- A five-step practical playbook for identifying and managing non-technical risks from the start.
- Lessons from large-scale industrial projects, and the patterns that appear regardless of sector.
- How specialized advisory support, combining European strategic communications experience with on-the-ground knowledge in complex industrial markets, can reduce investment risk.

Non-technical risks are now dominant drivers of cost overruns and delays in large industrial projects worldwide. In the Germany-India corridor, three structural forces amplify these risks: political speed asymmetry, regulatory complexity on both sides of the border, and a social media environment that leaves no time for slow responses.