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Speech from the Prime Minister during the Power Breakfast at the World Economic Forum in Davos

Monseigneur,
Madam,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear friends,

I am delighted to welcome you at our Power Breakfast.
On behalf of Belgium, I really appreciate your presence this morning.

After a long political crisis, Belgium has within a year launched a new positive and resilient dynamic, despite the difficult economic circumstances.

So I am proud to be able to say: Belgium is back! And, by extension, 'back' in Davos.

I would like to thank Prince Philippe and Princess Mathilde, my colleague Minister-President of the Flemish Government Kris Peeters and Doctor Bertrand Piccard for being here with us today.

Mister Piccard, I'm sure that it was no coincidence that the first stop of your amazing solar-power airplane, in 2011, was in Belgium.

You decided to head to a country that perfectly sums up an open-minded attitude towards the world, a quest for excellence and innovation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you know, Belgium hosts the headquarters of the main European institutions, NATO and many multinational companies.

We are a meeting point for political and economic policymakers from all corners of the globe.

Expatriates have every good reason to come to our country. Belgium enjoys an outstanding quality of life.

Yes, we have hundreds of different types of beers and our chocolates are the envy of the entire world.

However, what expatriates living in Belgium love above all is the reasonable cost of living, the high standards of our schools and our health care system, one of the best in the world.

Dear friends,

A recent report showed that we are the fourth most open economy in the world.

We are naturally open to trade and a welcoming place for business.

Look at the many Belgian companies, old and new, that are leaders in their fields.

Or look at the presence of a large number of world-renowned companies.

Ladies and Gentleman,

I can honestly say that Belgium offers great opportunities and significant added value.

Our strategic position is unique in Europe.

We are the centre of the continent's wealthiest and most populated area.

Another major asset is our top-quality, highly dense infrastructure.

Next to that, Belgium also has a lot of available space, highly suitable locations for logistics bases or distribution centres. And real estate prices are much lower than the European average.

It is no surprise that, according to a Cushman & Wakefield survey, Belgium is the top logistics country in Europe.

But that is not all.

Various international reports show that Belgium's labour force is the fourth most productive in the world and the most productive in Europe.

Our workers benefit a high level of education and training in many fields.

And our universities and researchers enjoy a well-deserved reputation for excellence. Finally, companies enjoy a business-friendly tax system. Notional interests, ruling, tax shelter, R&D-friendly tax measures. These are all different tools that support investments and create jobs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I firmly believe that, in order to overcome the crisis, we must stand out with excellent, innovative products and services.

In this respect, my country strongly supports entrepreneurs and businesses investing in creative talent and innovation.

With results.

Eurostat reported in early January that Belgium has the highest proportion of innovative companies in the EU, just after Germany and Luxemburg.

It is true, several Belgian based companies are highly successful in innovation-oriented sectors such as, for instance, chemistry and life sciences, pharmaceuticals, aeronautics, health care, environmental technologies and ICT.

Dear friends,

I don't need to remind you how difficult the current economic situation is.

Our country like the other countries in the Eurozone is not immune to the woes affecting all the world economies.

However, what is important now for Belgium, is to take substantial measures to move forward more quickly and more effectively.

Belgium has implemented key reforms to consolidate its public finances and improve its economy.

I am proud to be able to tell you that Belgium is again among the leading Euro zone Member States.

We have regained our credibility and enjoy the confidence of the financial markets.

Our 10-year interest rates are amongst the lowest ones (2.3%), and the spread with Germany, the benchmark country, is only 74 points. It was more than 350 points a little more than a year ago!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our country's situation is definitely improving.

Still we can certainly not rest on our laurels.

Belgium's number one priorities are creating employment, attracting new businesses and maintaining the high quality of our social security system.

In addition to the efforts of our regional governments of Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels, the federal government has launched a new growth strategy.

We have taken concrete measures to further support companies and entrepreneurs: lower social security contributions, wage moderation, decrease in energy prices, less administrative tasks, support for research and innovation and easier access to funding.

The federal government also established close partnerships with the chemical and pharmaceutical sectors.

I would like to thank the representatives of essenscia, the Belgian Federation for Chemistry and Life Sciences Industries, who are here today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

"Made in Belgium" is already synonymous with top-quality, reliable goods and services.

We are going to do our utmost to make sure that our economy will be one of the most creative in the world.

So, dear friends, my country is very eager to welcome you.

The doors of my office and those of my colleagues are wide open.

Welcome to Belgium!

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