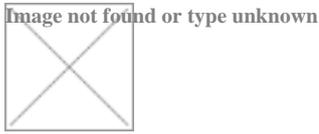


Speech
18 January 2017

Speech of the Prime Minister - Davos



Your Majesties,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is great to be back in Davos.

I was not here last year.
But I had a good reason : the birth of my daughter.

This year I really wanted to be here so I was a bit more careful?

We are very happy to welcome Their Majesties King Philippe and Queen Mathilde.

You promote our country in the interest of all our citizens.

We appreciate your support and your enthusiasm.
Thank you very much.

Welcome to Geert Bourgeois, the Minister-President of Flanders. And not ONE ? but TWO deputy prime ministers, Kris Peeters and Alexander De Croo.

You see, we are a very active team this year.
We join forces.
And that is very important.

Two years ago it was my first time in Davos as prime minister.

And I announced that we would be a business friendly government.
A government that supports investments and offers legal stability in order to create more jobs.

Two years later I can say we have kept our promise.

We can boast good results and excellent progress.

More people are now at work in the Belgian economy than ever before.

Companies have created more than one hundred thousand jobs.

Our unemployment has decreased to its lowest level in 25 years.

We have taken important steps to reform our tax system.

And again, with good results ?

Because never before in the last 10 years did so many companies start a business in Belgium.

This shows that we have chosen the right path.

We have reduced the wage handicap in comparison to our neighboring countries.

We have promoted the competitiveness of our companies by reducing taxes on labor.

We have taken good care of our SME's who constitute a big part of our economic activity.

And only last week, our social partners concluded an agreement within the framework of our reforms.

This is excellent news for social stability in the next two years.

The last poll conducted by the National Bank in December shows that confidence of companies has grown.

So yes, we are facing new challenges.

But yes, we can boast a strong and flexible economy.

One hundred thousand jobs mean more welfare and more people who have the means to support their families.

And that is exactly at the heart of our mission : we want more jobs to support our social security.

Solidarity is not a just a slogan.

It is vital to our society.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We will continue to reform our economy and our labor market.

So if it is progress you are looking for, I say come to Belgium!

Our productivity index is among the highest in the world.

And that is of course great news.

But we do not wait for investors to come to Belgium.

We come to you!

We want to support business and offer stability and have a strategic vision of the future.

We are launching an important investment program for the next fifteen years in order to improve infrastructure, the digital agenda and the energy transition.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Challenges like the Brexit can offer new opportunities.

We strongly believe that Brussels can compete with other cities when it comes to financial technology or pharmaceutical research, for example.

Fintech is big in Belgium with many start-ups and know how.
We have created B-hive with companies like Swift and Euroclear.

This is a big project we set up to attract more players in this field.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

These are testing times.

Europe is facing many sensitive issues at the same time :

the Brexit, the elections in the United States, the geopolitical situation in the south of Europe and our dialogue with Russia.

In Belgium we also know that the fight against terrorism is a common fight. Defending our values and liberty is essential.

It is not the first time in history we are confronted with similar obstacles.

But I know that innovation and creativity, good will and hard work provide the best answers.

In Belgium ? we are ready to work very hard in order to make things happen.

I know ? it is not just your natural resources or your location.

It is your knowledge, your skills, your attitude that count.

We can offer a better world to future generations if we are prepared to change and adapt to change.

You expect a lot from us. But we expect a lot from you.

But I can guarantee you: this is a win-win situation from which both of us can benefit.

Our ambitions are strong. Do not hesitate.
Welcome to Belgium, the right place to do business.
I wish you a fruitful stay in Davos.

Thank you and best wishes for the new year.

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