

Dear Mr. Steinacher and professor Tsesmelis, our CERN hosts today, Dear Ambassadors Sabina Stadler Repnik and Marta Kos, Dear State Secretary dr. Jernej Štromajer, Respectable guests and entrepreneurs,

I am honoured to be here today and proud to be part of this business event, which can become a breaking point in the cooperation between CERN and Slovenian companies. To make the most of today's networking, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia has taken over the role of identifying Slovenian export-oriented companies with a high potential to create value-added to CERN partners.

During the last decades, Slovenian companies have found their strengths in different specialised fields and niche markets. The quality approach, new ideas and solutions, created by Slovenian experts and innovators, have enabled them to play an indispensable role in global supply chains. With their long-standing experience in international business, these companies are reliable and development partners. Many of them are looking for new opportunities to prove themselves in a hi-tech global environment.

Slovenia is a flexible and globally competitive open economy. Although small by size, but just out of the same reason, Slovenia traditionally interacts with international markets. Our economy is – so to say - an “export expert”, although 90% of our export revenues are generated on markets within a radius of 1,000 kilometres from our capital Ljubljana. Export in 2018 is almost twice as high as in 2000 and the export share in GDP is 77%.

The Slovenian economy has been growing over the last six years. In the first half of 2019, Slovenia recorded a relatively high economic growth of 2.9%, which is one of the highest growth rates in the EU. Real economic growth stood at 4.1% in 2018, which is double the long-term growth assessment. Following the growth in consumption, only investments in fixed assets remain below the pre-crisis level.

Slovenia's bilateral trade closely connects our economy to Western European countries, with Germany far ahead on the first place, followed by Austria, Italy and France. Throughout the years, our companies have proved themselves as innovative and reliable suppliers of cars and car parts, pharmaceuticals and electrical equipment as top industrial products. Highly skilled workforce and widely spoken foreign languages are among the most important elements to attract foreign investments.

The largest portion of the GDP is generated by service activities – 64% -, in particularly tourism. The industrial sector represents approximately 26% of total GDP, the construction sector 8% and agriculture 2%. Similar to the structure of the export, is the distribution of main Slovenian industries.

The automotive industry generates 10% of the GDP and 12.5% of exports of goods, supplying German carmakers Audi, BMW, Daimler, VW, MAN, and Ford, followed by France, Italy, Austria, the UK, and the USA. Actually, every car, produced in Europe, contains at least one part, made in Slovenia.

The second important branch is electrical and electronics industry. This group earns 76% of revenues in foreign markets. Home-grown companies, such as Gorenje Group and BSH as part of Bosch group, both household appliance maker, ranks among top Slovenian exporters.

An important role in the Slovenian export mix play chemicals and pharmaceuticals, which record nearly 77% of sales earned in foreign markets. Pharmaceuticals are the first pillar of the export mix, tyres and inner tubes for vehicles come second, followed by plastics. Just in the phase, when our main export markets for automotive products and machinery building are slowing down, pharmaceuticals mark a 9% growth rate in export. This is mainly due to Swiss investors in this sector.

Slovenia's ICT sector is small, employing 25.000 people, but nevertheless strong in terms of competencies, level of services and solutions. Those solutions support new digital business models, government and e-health solutions, smart city and IoT solutions, paperless and production process automation solutions and various niche solutions.

Logistics and distribution are also strong pillars of the Slovenian economy. Two pan-European Transport Corridors linking the west and the east, the north and the south, intersect on our territory. Slovenia's short coastline of the northern Adriatic Sea with its Port of Koper links it to the Mediterranean for goods, which transit via Suez and Gibraltar.

Vast forests of Slovenia enable a long tradition in woodworking industry. Our country ranks third in Europe after Finland and Sweden with over 60 per cent of its territory under forests. Wooden houses and interiors of contemporary design, millwork and custom woodworking manufacturers tap the local skills heritage.

As per modern technologies and top-level researches in areas such as production and control, ITC, knowledge, biotechnologies, new materials, environmental technologies, nanotechnologies and nuclear engineering, the Jožef Stefan Institute plays a leading role. The staff of more than 960 specializes in natural sciences, life sciences and engineering.

Some of you may already have visited our beautiful country and thus contributed to positive statistics of tourism, which generates almost 13% of the country's GDP. Slovenia's preserved natural environment, its prudent natural resource management, the landscape and the towns attract tourists from all over the world. Visitors are often astonished by our cuisine, which is a mix of Mediterranean and Continental flavours, but with touch of our origins and innovative approach.

Last, but not least, I have to mention people – Slovenians. We see ourselves as hardworking, sports loving and to nature preservation dedicated people. Our sports champions in Alpine and Nordic winter sports, cycling, climbing and in top team sports are true ambassadors of what Slovenians like to do in their free time. English is the most widely spoken language; German closely follows it.

So, in the name of our Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia, I invite you to get to know us, our companies which are present here today and I'm convinced that new partnerships will develop in the future. I'm looking forward to recording some good business results of our visit and further enhance them at our next business visit in this esteemed institution.

Thank you!