

Merkel pins hopes on IT as world's top tech fair opens

March 4 2013, by Richard Carter

German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Monday said the IT industry was one of the key potential sources for growth in the crisis-hit eurozone, as she opened the world's biggest high-tech fair.

Formally inaugurating the CeBIT fair here, Merkel said that while "a lot" had been done to stabilise the euro, "we still talk about creating growth without really having an answer as to where this growth is going to come from."

"The IT industry is without doubt one of the possibilities and one of my dreams ... is to create the same founding conditions for all small IT companies everywhere in Europe," said Merkel.

Hours earlier, Germany's IT industry lobby BITKOM forecast sales growth in 2013 to rise by 1.4 percent to 153.3 billion euros (\$199 billion), driven by a solid market in smartphones and [tablet computers](#).

While a slight drop from the 2.2 percent seen last year, the forecast is still considerably higher than the 0.4 percent total overall growth for the German economy, the largest in Europe, noted BITKOM president Dieter Kempf.

Sales of tablet computers in Germany were expected to rise by 11 percent to 2.3 billion euros, the lobby forecast. "Sales of tablets should for the first time show the same sales levels as desktop PCs," predicted Kempf.

The BITKOM figures also showed a near-complete transformation from standard mobile phones to smartphones in the past four years.

In 2009, smartphones accounted for just 17 percent of phones sold and 34 percent of the turnover.

By the end of 2013, they were expected to account for 81 percent of units sold and 96 percent of the sales in the 8.8-billion euro German market.

Global IT spending was expected to rise this year by 5.1 percent to 2.7 trillion euros, forecast BITKOM, with India (+13.9 percent), Brazil (+9.6 percent) and China (+8.9 percent) the biggest growth markets.

"There is a shift in the 2013 country ranking: China has overtaken Japan and is for the first time the second biggest national market," said Kempf.

China holds 9.5 percent of the global IT market, now ahead of Japan with 8.3 percent. Both Asian giants are still comfortably behind the United States, which enjoys a 26.8-percent share of the world's technology market.

Around 4,100 exhibitors from some 70 countries are expected in the northern German city of Hanover for the CeBIT fair, including tech giants Microsoft, SAP, IBM and Google.

This year's theme is "shareconomy", the increasing trend of users sharing data and things, with examples being car sharing and social media sites like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Prime Minister Donald Tusk, from this year's partner country Poland, also implored the European Union to come up with ways to make the recession-wracked continent more innovative.

"The debt crisis, the financial market crisis, is not the only problem. We have to fight the crisis but day in, day out, but we have to provide answers to the questions of how to secure the competitiveness of Europe," said Tusk.

Also present at the inauguration ceremony was the chief executive of European aerospace giant EADS, Tom Enders, who called for a closer cooperation between the IT sector and the aerospace industry.

The CeBIT opens its door formally tomorrow, with a host of head-spinning and innovative gadgets awaiting the tens of thousands expected to stream through the hangar-like halls in the northern city of Hanover.

This year's hits include a "3D printer" that creates objects from a computer read-out, a chair for couch potatoes that turns into a rowing machine if you get too fat and a "smart" shopping trolley that does the supermarket run for you.

Also likely to draw attention is a 3D display allowing users to scroll through precious mediaeval books with just a wave of the hand, tomes that are normally banished behind a glass case or touchable only with white gloves.

The [CeBIT](#) runs until March 9.

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