Welcome Address

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Dr Eder
Mr Kerkhoff
Ladies and gentlemen
It is a pleasure to welcome you all here in Düsseldorf for the eighth METEC InsteelCon.
METEC InsteelCon is a tradeshow of world renown, covering a central and forward-looking discipline with an impact on almost every sphere of life: steel, an innovative material.
And it is not for nothing that this event is held in North Rhine-Westphalia.

Ladies and gentlemen
North Rhine-Westphalia is Germany’s number one centre of materials engineering and expertise.
It is where research excellence, innovative start-ups and a powerful industrial sector are clustered together.
This goes doubly for metal and steel engineering and research, as well as the production and processing of such materials.
The concentration of research institutions is larger than anywhere else in the world – establishments such as the Max Planck Institute for Iron Research, VDEh Stahlinstitut, the steel industry umbrella, Bochum University’s ICAMS or numerous other research teams, at Aachen RWTH and elsewhere.
More than 40 per cent of German metal producers and processors are based in North Rhine-Westphalia.

Ladies and gentlemen
You are all aware, of course, that materials are crucial to the technological advancement of our society.
They belong to the key technologies that play a vital role for the efficiency of our state as an economic player.

Some 70 per cent of technological innovations have only become possible after the development of new materials – and that includes the field of energy and environmental technologies.

A prominent role is set aside here for iron and steel – hardly surprising, given that they are used everywhere and offer excellent value for money. It is especially here in North Rhine-Westphalia that great things are done in research and development to ensure that these materials are up to current standards.

New steel-based materials pave the way for pioneering innovations, for example in the area of lightweight construction or wind farms.

Ladies and gentlemen
All this shows that materials and materials technologies have a significance beyond the commercial side, harbouring the potential for resolving the challenges we are facing around the world, such as climate change, the limit of resources and energy.

The “Innovation Union” as one of seven Europe 2020 Flagship Initiatives aims to use and amplify Europe’s strengths creatively and productively in a move to address, in a focused way, these “grand challenges”.

The government of North Rhine-Westphalia embraces the broad-based EU “Innovation” approach.

And we go one step further:
In North Rhine-Westphalia, we are currently very busy working out what exactly it means these days when we talk about the ‘advances of society’ or about ‘growth’.

We believe that successful innovation takes more than technological novelties and economic results.
People must be at the focus of innovative products and services – which is why we want a crucial role set aside for quality and the environment. This is also why we need integrated strategies. If progress is to be successful, it needs to have an impact on the individual as well as on society as a whole.

Achieve this and you will have sustainable progress.

No gain in social justice, no gain in progress.

And this is where we in North Rhine-Westphalia are in an outstanding position:

In recent years, North Rhine-Westphalia’s product line has continuously widened, and so has the range of cutting-edge technologies in the state. Eco-technologies in particular have advanced in leaps and bounds: wind farms, solar cells, ‘technology areas’ such as new materials or lightweight construction, chemical innovations, the latest in logistics or information technology.

All that demonstrates that North Rhine-Westphalia is – and will always be – a centre of industry.

We need to marry tradition with innovation:

The academic, research and business communities in North Rhine-Westphalia have not only come up with the proper adjustment strategies, they have also developed alternative approaches and are making significant strides on the road to success.

In North Rhine-Westphalia, sustainability will therefore not be a buzzword but a factor of success.

Dovetailing sustainability and industry will create a strategic alliance for the future, therefore providing North Rhine-Westphalia with outstanding opportunities.
Ladies and gentlemen
We are in the right position here in North Rhine-Westphalia to encourage innovation – especially in the field of materials and materials technologies.
This gives us direct influence on improvements, which not only contribute to the protection of the environment and to sustainable economic and living conditions but which also help safeguard jobs and prosperity here in North Rhine-Westphalia.
The State Government is therefore making all-out efforts to ‘strengthen the strengths’ in NRW:
These key technologies are amongst the focal areas of the State Government’s funding policy.
By 2015 we will have spent more than 100 million euros on R&D projects as well as infrastructure in the nano/micro materials sector – of which steel is a vital part.
That is on top of the funds we invest in universities and research facilities.

Ladies and gentlemen
METEC InsteelCon complements our policy substantially:
It brings together business and industry, institutions, researchers and other experts, so that they can have discussions and implement their plans and strategies for the future.
I am delighted that it is now the eighth time that we have this platform for talks in Düsseldorf – and that you will be discussing, conscious of the challenges I have summed up.
I therefore wish you therefore every success in developing new ideas and building new forms of cooperation.
Glück auf!