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**Ministry for Economic Affairs, Innovation, Digitisation and Energy**

**Welcoming Address for the "N.I.C.E. Executive Dinner" and N.I.C.E. Award  
Ceremony on 6 September 2017, 6 – 10 pm at the Philharmonie Essen**

**Duration of speech: approx. 15 minutes**

**The spoken word shall prevail!**

Professor Gorny,

Ms Stenros,

Our Jury,

The Candidates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Things are going to get exciting tonight – by the end of the evening, we will have found out who is to receive this year's Network for Innovations in Culture and Creativity in Europe prize – in short and much easier, the NICE award. Until then, Ladies and Gentlemen, let's enjoy a great evening together. And what the organisers mean by a great evening is that we sit down together at the tables here and get into conversation with one another.

Over the next few minutes, my task will be to help get these conversations started. I am doing this as the representative of the Minister for Economic Affairs of North Rhine-Westphalia, Prof. Dr Andreas Pinkwart. And I am really pleased to be doing this—not just because representing the Minister is an honourable task. I am pleased to be taking on this task because I look forward to giving some fundamental clarification on the state government's economic policy. And, over the course of the evening, I hope to talk to you about the areas in which we can amend our program so

that we cater for the needs of creative companies and entrepreneurs in our state in an even better way.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The new state government of North Rhine-Westphalia, which has been in office since July, has made the digitisation of the economy and society an important objective. North Rhine-Westphalia's administration is also set to become more digital and, thereby, more citizen-friendly. The newly created Ministry for Economic Affairs—now the Ministry for Economic Affairs, Innovation, Digitisation and Energy—will play a leading role in this. But we don't just want to digitise ourselves. We also want to expand our strategy for strengthening the digitisation of the economy in North Rhine-Westphalia. We are talking here about the required infrastructure—broadband expansion—and about the networking of start-ups and medium-sized businesses; for example, as is happening in the digital hubs that have been created in the regions on the initiative of the State—including the Ruhr area, here in Essen.

Ladies and Gentlemen, when it comes to preparing our economy for the challenges of the future, we are also betting on the many creative minds in our state. Nearly 300,000 people are employed in the creative economy in North Rhine-Westphalia. This number has increased by approximately ten percent since 2010. There are approximately 51,000 companies in this sector, with an annual revenue of 36 billion euros. These are figures we can be proud of. But if we look beyond the figures, we see that creative industries provide impulses at the interfaces to other industries. This allows new and sustainable products and services to be created—an important requirement for economic growth in North Rhine-Westphalia. For these developments to remain positive, we need room—both literally and figuratively—for new ideas to be developed. And we need opportunities to showcase these new ideas so that the famous spark of creativity can spread.

Ladies and Gentlemen, events like tonight's award ceremony and the "Forum Europe Ruhr", which will be held here tomorrow, are important to us because they bring together creativity and the entrepreneurial spirit. This is how innovation and new values come into being. And this is why the Ministry for Economic Affairs is giving its backing to the NICE Award for the third time now.

We are doing this because we see the ideas produced by this competition and how these ideas are developed further after receiving the award. For example, in 2016, the award went to the project "Public Residence – the chance" from the association "Machbarschaft Borsig11". Borsig11, which has its home in the legendary Borsigplatz in Dortmund, uses art as a means to create more opportunities in this part of the city. Since 2014, "chances"—a creative currency used by residents to help improve their district—have been in circulation in the Borsigplatz in Dortmund. At the beginning of the project, 100 chances were paid to anyone who was interested in taking part. For one year, various guest artists came to develop and implement projects with the local residents. Anyone who participated in the projects received more chances, which then allowed further projects to be realised. This started a cycle that continues to this day. After "Public Residence" had ended and the artists had left, the local residents took the initiative and are continuing to use chances to bring about change in their district. Receiving the NICE award allowed the association and the project to achieve greater prominence in the public domain. In the ideal case, it will also provide access long-term to new supporters and sponsors.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as you can see, the NICE Award guarantees attention for creativity and for the key players behind the projects. This is important to us because we are convinced that the creative economy is an innovative sector that provides important impulses for the economy and for society. This can be clearly seen in the broad range of submissions which have once again been received this year.

The shortlist from which the jury selected the recipients of today's prize, and which will be presented to you in a moment, also includes four projects from the Ruhr area. As a representative of the North Rhine-Westphalian Ministry for Economic Affairs, this makes me especially proud. But I am also interested in and excited about the other five nominees from across Europe. Through the NICE Award, Professor Gorny, ecce and its European partners have succeeded in building bridges. This is something we need in times like these.

Ladies and Gentlemen, when we sit down shortly to have dinner together, I also hope to get into conversation with you about what we can do to move North Rhine-Westphalia forward together. As creative thinkers and entrepreneurs, you can provide important impulses for shaping our future.

Essen, and thereby North Rhine-Westphalia, will increase its profile through the NICE Award and the Forum Europe Ruhr – today and tomorrow, the Philharmonie will serve as a European meeting place. I am especially pleased about this. This is a place where creativity becomes innovation.

We need such opportunities where creative individuals and other entrepreneurs get to see the bigger picture, exchange ideas and perhaps even get involved in the development of new businesses. That's why I like the approach of bringing people from different branches of the economy together at the same table on an evening like this.

We need such opportunities where people can meet and develop new ideas together. And we need people who create these opportunities and venues.

My thanks therefore go to the ecce team who have made such an event possible, both today and tomorrow. A glance at the programme of the Forum Europe Ruhr, which I will also be participating in tomorrow, shows me the breadth of the topics. What they all have in common is this – they form a connection between creativity, the creative economy and innovation. I would also therefore like to thank the jury, headed for the first time by Anne Stenros, for all their hard work. They have compiled a shortlist for us that is sure to provide inspiration and new insights. And we are looking forward to seeing who they have chosen for the prizes. Ladies and Gentlemen of the jury – thank you for your dedication!

Dear Guests, the state government promotes innovation in various different ways. In doing so, we are constantly on the lookout for new paths to take:

We want to free future entrepreneurs from unnecessary and complicated bureaucracy. For this purpose, the Ministry for Economic Affairs has launched an online survey. Those interested in starting businesses and young entrepreneurs can tell us what rules and regulations they think could be omitted and how they would envisage start-up-friendly policies.

We want to integrate the findings into our policies for a new era of start-ups in North Rhine-Westphalia.

Ladies and Gentlemen, if you are from North Rhine-Westphalia and have started a business here – you are more than welcome to take part.

Furthermore, we are planning a number of measures to make it easier to start a business. This includes the "North Rhine-Westphalian founders grant" through which we will support 1,000 founders of businesses with 1,000 euros per month.

For those who have already successfully positioned themselves in the market, we are launching a modernisation offensive called "New Business Models". This will review the question as to whether our laws and regulations contain obstacles to the creation of new digital business models.

Our goal is to reduce hurdles and create fair terms of competition, both for established and for new business models. When I look at the projects on the shortlist for tonight's event, I think that this is something the initiators will appreciate. I would therefore like to extend a warm invitation to our international guests to come and implement their plans in North Rhine-Westphalia. Come to us, set up a base here in the Rhine and Ruhr area, and profit from our beneficial framework conditions.

We in North Rhine-Westphalia, Ladies and Gentlemen, are consciously putting our faith in the creative industries as the driving force of innovation. Creative thinkers are a characteristic feature of our location and their activities should receive well-deserved attention. Getting attention is also key for obtaining the initial capital required for a business. An event with a strong focus on the connection between creativity and innovation is therefore the right place for taking in new impulses.

We want to turn North Rhine-Westphalia into a sought-after location for creative founders and businesses. I invite you to join us in pursuing this goal!

And now, I wish you a pleasant evening with delicious food and drink, lively conversation and an inspiring programme of events here on the stage.