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**Federal President Joachim Gauck
at the Joint Korean-German Conference
“Science and Innovation”
in Seoul, Korea
on 13 October 2015**

I am delighted to be with you here this morning and to be taking part in this conference on innovation, the latest in a series of conferences which perfectly reflects the lively, fruitful relations between our two countries. I would like to thank all those who, through their work on this series of conferences, are helping to develop ideas for the future of our two countries, as well as ways to strengthen Korean-German relations. I wish to extend special thanks to the committed members of the Alumni Network Germany-Korea.

In devoting this year’s conference to innovation, you have chosen a topic particularly close to my heart. You are all familiar with the global challenges we are facing together: finite resources, ensuring food security for all, which we still have not managed to do, and the fight against epidemics. If we are to preserve the sources of our livelihood, if we are to ensure growth and prosperity in our countries and improve the living conditions of people the world over, we constantly need new ideas and new solutions. We need innovation. To that end, we must do our utmost to develop our countries’ potential.

Some of you may feel that I’m preaching to the converted here. And it is undoubtedly true that your country has succeeded in harnessing its combined energies to bring about fundamental change, at the same time mobilising remarkable creativity. Since the 1950s, Korea has grown from an impoverished agricultural state ravaged by war and damaged by division to a modern, democratic industrial state. The world watched in amazement and astonishment as, within two short generations, Korea resolutely pursued economic growth, an ascendancy which – it shouldn’t be denied – did occasionally cause some anxiety in the Western industrialised countries as they saw their hard-working Korean competitors become a force to be reckoned with on the international markets.

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Today your country is the world's thirteenth-largest economy and fifth-largest exporter. Rapidly negotiating a huge technological learning curve, Korea absolutely catapulted itself into the computer age, as it regularly demonstrates at the major high-tech trade fairs in Germany. Today your country produces some of the world's most cutting-edge and, especially, best-selling IT products. You have built up a digital infrastructure which is the envy of many Western industrial countries. And in the international comparison Korea is one of the biggest spenders on education, science and research.

Your country's success story is the result of tremendous joint efforts by many Koreans. The spur they all shared was their determination to bring about change, to see progress.

We Germans, too, can say that the power of innovation evolves best through teamwork, through cooperation between and among companies and research institutions, both at home and abroad. We need researchers with a pioneering spirit, who are curious about the world and who delight in discovery. We also need entrepreneurs who think creatively, and are willing to try out and to finance new things. And of course we need politicians who create the right framework for innovation. The interaction between politicians, entrepreneurs and scientists is particularly important. Those responsible need to push forward, and sometimes it demands time and effort to get innovations through.

There is one crucial actor in the process of innovation that I haven't mentioned yet: society, the citizens, the people in our countries. But ultimately it is all about their quality of life, their ideas, their expectations. So we need a social consensus on innovation and openness. To that end we need to exchange views, talk, sometimes even argue – about the opportunities and risks inherent in innovation, about freedoms and boundaries. And we must be prepared to have the courage to do new and extraordinary things. Debates on innovation are always also processes of soul-searching in society: how willing to change do we as a society want to be? How willing to take risks? How open do we want to be to new technologies and new procedures? How willing do we want to be to learn? How happy to experiment? In saturated societies where there is already an air of success, for example in Germany, this is sometimes difficult. When we in Germany are looking for answers, I think we can learn from the Korean experience.

Whether innovation falls on fertile soil and bears fruit in society is in part up to you, ladies and gentlemen. The job of an innovation broker is undoubtedly a difficult one: innovations by their very nature involve imponderables. Innovation creates not only winners, but sometimes losers too. We must not shy away from addressing this.

In Germany we have good experience of designing innovative projects in a transparent way and involving the people at an early stage. This is not easy, and sometimes it involves considerable conflict, but it means too – not least thanks to timely communication – that obstacles along the way from having an innovative idea to putting it into practice can be recognised early on and faults corrected promptly.

One might mention many areas of innovation which are posing challenges for our countries. I would like to conclude by focusing on just one, which you will be looking at again this afternoon. Namely the digital steering of entire industrial production processes – a development for which we in Germany have coined the term “Industry 4.0”. You also often hear the phrase “fourth industrial revolution”. This in itself is enough to show we are talking about more than mere technical progress. What we are experiencing, in fact, is a fundamental change in the world of work which gives rise to equally fundamental questions. What impact will increasing robotisation have on the relationship between people and machines? And how will it affect the future prospects of people of different talents and abilities? What work, what qualifications, will be needed? And how will we organise work that, thanks to modern steering and communications technologies, is less tied to specific times and places?

The answers to these questions, however, and the development of Work 4.0, will not be determined by computers or algorithms, ladies and gentlemen. Rather, this is a task for us humans, a creative process of searching and learning for which we need the freedom of the intellect, freedom to embrace new, unusual, even unheard-of thoughts and ideas. Otherwise there can be no real solutions for the future. With this in mind, I would like to wish you an inspiring conference. May you enjoy encounters, lectures and talks which will encourage your pioneering spirit and enrich both our two countries and our innovation partnership.