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## “They prevailed against all odds because they believed in their ideas”

### German president presented Europe's most lucrative environmental prize today in Osnabrück – DBU confers award

**Osnabrück. German President Joachim Gauck today commended the new winners of the German Environmental Award of the Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt (DBU) for their courage in taking on conflicts to promote their visions and in overcoming obstacles. Gauck: “They persevered. They also took risks. They prevailed against all odds because they believed in their ideas. They weren't deterred. They went their own way.” The founder and managing director of the company Hock (Nördlingen), Carmen Hock-Heyl (58), and the chairwoman of the board at Netzkauf Elektrizitätswerke Schönau (EWS), Ursula Sladek (67), received the 500,000-euro award – the most lucrative environmental prize in Europe – from his hands in Osnabrück.**

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*Environmental protection to leave following generations with liveable cities and villages*

Speaking in front of some 1,600 guests – including German Environment Minister Peter Altmaier and the premier of Lower Saxony, Stephan Weil – Gauck said that environmental protection today no longer meant “strenuous ideologies”, but was turned by powerful personalities into something enjoyable. The prizewinners, he said, represented “people who can encourage us: with their energy, with their imagination, and with their positive attitude to life, which give us so much confidence in our own potential. Gauck: “People who believe in themselves and believe we are all capable of something. And who do not just combine this with visions, but also succeed in turning such visionary ideas into absolutely normal everyday life.” He said that they often did this in a way that allowed them to earn money with their visions and enabled them to position themselves in a tough competitive field. change and visions and was an economic factor and a lifestyle. Gauck said he was convinced that fear and fatalism could not create a good climate for necessary changes. The question, according to Gauck, was connected with the concern about how we could retain the strength of our industrial society in the face of the change we were facing with-

out overexploiting nature. Another question was how we could leave behind liveable cities and villages for succeeding generations, he said. Gauck said that the outstanding inventions made by the winners of the German Environmental Award showed that small steps can sometimes make a large impact, and thus boosted optimism about our ability to overcome future challenges independently and with our own means.

#### *German environmental technology already in demand worldwide*

Leaders of the ecology movement had called for intelligent growth using efficient technologies and sound material cycles, Gauck said. He said it seemed a sensible idea to him that Germany needed founders and inventors, entrepreneurs in the best sense of the word, who were prepared to overcome obstacles, to invest and to venture into new markets. German environmental technology was already in demand worldwide, he said, adding that if the standard of living in emerging countries continued to rise, environmental protection would become even more vital – and that German ideas for sustainable growth could experience a boom.

#### *Transition to renewable energies: passionate, but less dogmatic and uncompromising discussion*

Gauck said there were currently also conflicts and resistance surrounding Germany's shift to renewable energy sources, which had been agreed on across the political spectrum, but had yet to become a concrete success. And, according to the German president, the changes that this shift would bring would not take place without discussions, or even disputes – but that a sleepy harmony was of no help either. He said committed citizens were needed who argued for their convictions passionately, but less dogmatically and with more willingness to compromise. Gauck underlined that this was the strength of democracy and of our market economy as well: the constant search for alternatives and competition for the best way forward.

#### *Thanks to the former DBU secretary general*

In his speech, the president thanked former DBU Secretary General Dr. Fritz Brickwedde, who went into retirement on 1 October, for his commitment over the past 22 years. Brickwedde had contributed to giving the German Environmental Award a good reputation throughout Germany and making it stand for resourcefulness and civil courage, Gauck said.

#### *The “hemp queen of Germany”*

As members of the German Environmental Award jury that nominates each year's prize-winners for selection by the DBU board of trustees, Dr. Klaus-Dieter Clausnitzer from the Bremer Energie Institut and Prof. Eicke R. Weber from the Fraunhofer Institute for Solar Energy Systems ISE in Freiburg spoke about the achievements of the 2013 prizewinners. Clausnitzer praised Carmen Hock-Heyl as the "hemp queen of Germany", and stressed the fact that the jury had nominated the prizewinner for three reasons: first, because of the plant product itself, secondly for her entrepreneurial ability and finally because of the socio-political context, as Carmen Hock-Heyl reconciled economy and ecology.

*Take up the public enthusiasm for energy transition*

Weber commended Ursula Sladek's achievement as an example of local, cooperative involvement that encouraged others to imitate it and proved that regional action groups "could achieve a huge amount". At the same time, the money that members of the public – the EWS did not have customers, but fellow campaigners, he said – had invested came back to back to them with good interest. Ursula Sladek and her fellow campaigners showed that every single individual could do a lot with regard to the shift in energy policy in Germany. Weber appealed to those involved in the current coalition negotiations in Berlin to take up the enthusiasm of the public for the energy transition and to turn it into political action.