

Bullish Schwarzenegger pumps up giant tech fair

March 2 2009, by Deborah Cole



California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger gives a speech during the opening ceremony of the world's biggest high-tech fair, the CeBIT, in Hanover. Schwarzenegger, guest of honour at the world's biggest high-tech fair, told crisis-hit executives Monday to stop their whining and invest in the future.

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In a rollicking speech on the eve of the CeBIT fair, Schwarzenegger drew on references from his career as a body-builder, actor and entrepreneur to pump up his recession-knocked audience, which included German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

"We are gathering in challenging times. Some may say this is the wrong time for a big trade show like this but they are wrong," the Austrian-born Schwarzenegger said.

"Losers whine but winners move forward in a strong and powerful way and I know that everyone who is here at the CeBIT is a winner!"

Speaking in English then German, Schwarzenegger said he was pleased to be back in the country where he got his start as a bodybuilder and looked forward to enjoying some "German beer and German food" again while in town.

"Never in my wildest dreams did I ever imagine I would come back to Germany as governor of the great state of California," he said.

In a nod to his state's budget woes, he noted the CeBIT's reputation as a major business generator and smiled: "I wish I had some of that money."

The notoriously chivalrous Schwarzenegger singled out Merkel, Germany's first female chancellor and Forbes magazine's most powerful woman in the world, for special praise.

"What an inspirational leader she is," he said, noting that she now even had a Barbie doll made in her image.

"That's really a sign you've arrived," he joked.

And he brought the house down at the end of his speech with a "Terminator" adieu: "I'll be back. Hasta la vista, baby."

Merkel, who is facing Germany's worst postwar recession and a general election in six months' time, thanked Schwarzenegger for bringing "a little American spirit" to the northern city of Hanover.

She urged high-tech business leaders to seize the opportunities presented by the crisis.

"Particularly in tough economic times we should focus on our strengths and find our niche among competitors," she said.

While in Hanover, Schwarzenegger will also pick up an award from the American Chamber of Commerce in Germany Tuesday for "his exceptional commitment to the global issues of environment and energy".

California is the honorary guest at this year's CeBIT and Schwarzenegger has come to the CeBIT with around 50 firms from California, most from ailing Silicon Valley.

The German press had hoped the "Governator" will give the event a shot in the arm this year.

Some 4,300 firms from 69 countries are to display the latest gadgets and innovations at the fair -- a quarter fewer than last year due to the global economic slump, organisers said.

That contrasts with the more than 8,000 exhibitors that attended in 2001 during the "new economy" heyday.

Nevertheless, Germany's high-tech industry said earlier Monday that it expects to buck the economic crisis this year with sales stagnating but not sinking.

Turnover in information technology, telecommunications and digital consumer electronics will hold steady at about 145 billion euros (183 billion dollars), the BITKOM industrial lobby.

"For the time being, the high-tech industry is holding its own in the crisis," group president August-Wilhelm Scheer told reporters.

"The sector looks pretty good compared to other industries."

Hot topics at this year's fair are expected to be energy-efficient "green" technology, the use of the Internet in revolutionising health care, the rise of electronic books and IT security.

The CeBIT runs until Sunday.

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