

Editorial close: 6 October 2008

No. 19/08

CONTENTS

HOME AFFAIRS

National elections: SPÖ remains number 1 – losses for large parties
Increase in long-term care benefits and abolishment of university fees

EUROPE ■ INTERNATIONAL

Federal President Fischer travels to Israel in December
Federal President Fischer pays visit to Berlin
UN conference: Gusenbauer pleads for sustainable energy systems

ECONOMY

Vice-Chancellor Molterer announces improved guarantee for savings in Austria
Full employment achieved in March
Austria is top investor in CEECs

CULTURE ■ MEDIA ■ SCIENCE

Graz: “Romale“ for more tolerance
Federal President Fischer opened “Klimt and the Art Show 1908“
Pope Benedict XVI. attends concert of Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra
Haydn Year 2009: touring exhibition stops in more than 30 countries
Hermann Nitsch Museum in Naples
Film director Stefan Ruzowitzky received prize “Efebo d’Oro“ in Sicily
European Jazz Prize 2008 went to percussionist Han Bennink
Torberg at the Jewish Museum Vienna
Nordic Modernism in Schönberg’s Vienna around 1900
Triumph: Martin Kušej produces “Weibsteufel“ at Akademietheater
Styrian autumn festival 2008

SPORTS POLICY

Chancellor Gusenbauer pays tribute to Austrian athletes
Austria’s homage to German Olympic medallist Matthias Steiner
Volleyball 2011: Men’s European Championship in Austria
“SPORT:DIALOGUE – Olympia“
Christiane Soeder best cyclist

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National elections: SPÖ remains number 1 – losses for large parties

On 28 September 2008 Austria elected a new National Council (1st chamber of Parliament). The two large coalition parties suffered heavy losses, reaching their lowest level of support. Based on the preliminary result, the SPÖ and the ÖVP lost a total of 14.2 percentage points of the votes.

The SPÖ (Social Democratic Party of Austria) led by party chief Werner Faymann remains number one but captured only 29.4% of the votes (minus 5.9%). As the party still winning most votes, the SPÖ is expected to appoint the next Chancellor. The early election – which had been called for by the ÖVP (Austrian People's Party) – ended with a severe defeat for the ÖVP under Party Chairman Wilhelm Molterer (who has resigned in the meantime). It lost 8.3 percentage points and was ranked second (26.0% of the votes). The actual winners of the elections are the two right-wing parties FPÖ (Freedom Party of Austria; +6.7%) and BZÖ (Alliance for the Future of Austria; +6.7%). The Greens recorded minor losses (0.9%) and are now only the fifth largest party in Parliament. The new National Council will again be composed of five parties.

6,332,921 citizens were entitled to vote. The election turnout was 76.6% (4,852,932 of the votes cast).

The preliminary final result of the National Council election 2008 (including the interim result of the postal ballots counted; status: 1 October) is as follows. The SPÖ won 1,398,620 votes or 29.4% (-5.9%). 1,235,116 votes or 26.0% (-8.3%) went to the ÖVP ranked second. The FPÖ is placed third with 839,520 or 17.7% (+6.7%) of the valid votes, followed by the BZÖ with 511,547 votes or 10.8% (+6.7%). The Greens received 480,536 votes or 10.1% (-0.9%). As far as the parties or lists not represented in Parliament, the KPÖ (Communist Party of Austria) took 0.8% of the votes, the LIF (Liberal Forum) 2.0% and List FRITZ (Dinkhauser) 1.8%. The remaining groups (DC, RETTÖ, LINKE, TRP, STARK und KLEM) registered less than 1% each.

The preliminary distribution of seats in the National Council is as follows: 58 SPÖ (-10), 51 ÖVP (-15), 34 FPÖ (+13), 21 BZÖ (+14), 19 Greens (-2). This might change insignificantly on 6 October after all postal ballots are counted. (The official result was not yet available at the editorial close.)

The constitutive meeting of the newly elected National Council will take place on 28 October 2008.

Based on standard practice, Federal Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer offered the resignation of his government to the Federal President on 30 September 2008. Subsequently, the head of state requested the federal government to stay in office until the new government is sworn in. Once the official election result is available, the Federal President will instruct SPÖ Chairman Faymann, as the leader of the party with the largest number of votes, to form a government.

Fischer has already held talks with the chairpersons of all five parliamentary parties. With regard to the forthcoming coalition negotiations, Fischer pled for “forming a government with great care and utmost responsibility“. The head of state stated that only a “stable government” could guarantee “serious legislative work“ and “constructive government work“.

SPÖ leader Faymann explicitly ruled out the possibility of alliances with the Freedomites and the BZÖ and wants to negotiate a new grand coalition with the ÖVP. ÖVP Chairman designate Josef Pröll has not yet excluded any option (“no binding commitment to coalition or opposition“). It was Faymann's turn to start talks, said Pröll, who was appointed acting party chairman on 29 September 2008. He will officially succeed to Wilhelm Molterer on the ÖVP's planned special party convention.

The head of the Greens, Alexander Van der Bellen, announced his resignation on 3 October 2008. ■

Increase in long-term care benefits and abolishment of university fees

On 24 September 2008, the National Council agreed on a number of anti-inflationary measures in its last plenary session before the new election. It adopted an increase in long-term care benefits (with effect 1 January 2009) and pensions (+3.4%; with effect November 2008), 13th monthly payment of family allowance, a renewal of the “special retirement scheme for heavy workers“ up to 2013 as well as the abolishment of the university fees. No majority was won for cutting the value-added tax on food by half. The tax rate of 10% will remain in force. The value-added tax on medication will, however, be reduced to 5%. ■

Federal President Fischer travels to Israel in December

Federal President Heinz Fischer will pay a state visit to Israel in early December, as his spokesman Bruno Aigner told APA (Austria Press Agency) on 24 September 2008. One day earlier Fischer had participated in the opening of the General Debate of the 63rd session of the UN General Assembly in New York. At the official dinner with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and other high-ranking personalities, Fischer met also with Israeli President Shimon Peres. Fischer and Peres discussed the planned visit of the Austrian president to Israel.

It is of vital interest to Austria to intensify the bilateral relations with Israel. During an official visit of Minister of Science Johannes Hahn in April of this year, Austria and Israel agreed on strengthening cooperation in science and research. The first mutual official visits of the respective heads of state were paid by former Israeli President Moshe Katsav to Austria in 2004 and by former Austrian President Thomas Klestil to Israel in 1994. Former Chancellor Franz Vranitzky recognised “Austria’s moral responsibility” for the crimes of the Nazi regime during his official visit to Israel in 1993. He asked the survivors and descendants of the victims “for forgiveness”.

Present-day Austria “fully backed this commitment”, Federal President Fischer stated at a state banquet hosted in honour of his Israeli counterpart Katsav in October 2004. Therefore Austria was also aware of “its very special responsibility in the combat against anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia and intolerance”. ■

Federal President Fischer pays visit to Berlin

Federal President Heinz Fischer held talks with Serbian President Boris Tadić, German Vice-Chancellor and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier as well as with Luxembourg’s Vice-Chancellor and Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn in Berlin on 3 October 2008, the Day of German Unity. The “Quadriga” was conferred on the prize winners in a ceremony at Komische Oper Berlin in the evening. Fischer gave the presentation speech in honour of Boris Tadić, praising his “notable” achievements in bringing Serbia closer

to the EU. President Tadić thanked Austria for its support in this process.

Every year the Quadriga is awarded to pay tribute to the extraordinary achievements of four personalities of institutions “whose thought and action reflects a mix of vision, courage and responsibility“. Other prize winners are pop star Peter Gabriel as a “mentor of human rights“, the Internet encyclopaedia Wikipedia for its mission of enlightenment as well as Franciscan Patres Eckart Höfling for his social commitment in Rio de Janeiro. ■

UN conference: Gusenbauer pleads for sustainable energy systems

At the development conference in New York on 25 September 2008, Austrian Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer highlighted the seventh of the ten UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), i.e. a sustainable and environment-friendly development. “Sustainable energy systems are a prerequisite for achieving the MDGs, for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and, with that, for stabilising the global climate“, Gusenbauer explained. He demanded a “technological revolution“ and promised help to the countries affected most severely by climate change.

“While the glaciers are melting, small island states are confronted with rising sea levels, flood disasters, hurricanes and other weather phenomena“, Gusenbauer stated. Other regions were faced with growing desertification. Therefore, it was an absolute must to provide support in the combat against the adverse effects of climate change.

Sustainability was highly important for the Austrian development cooperation, Gusenbauer explained. “We engage in active multilateral cooperation in the area of renewable energy and energy efficiency, in particular for small island states.“

Austria was a guest member of UNIDO (UN Industrial Development Organisation) as well as six other international agencies addressing energy issues, the Federal Chancellor emphasised.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on the international community to show solidarity and to lend its support. The conference succeeded in raising an additional amount of about 16 billion euros for the battle against poverty. ■

Vice-Chancellor announces better guarantees for savings in Austria

In view of the worsening bank crisis and Germany's announcement to guarantee the private savings deposits held by banks, Vice-Chancellor Minister of Finance Wilhelm Molterer – in agreement with Federal Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer – informed of the government's plan to increase the guarantee for savings deposits in Austria in the evening of 5 October 2008. The respective proposal would be submitted to the Council of Ministers on 8 October 2008. A concrete amount was not mentioned by the Minister of Finance. In a press release issued in the evening of the same day, the Chancellor stated that in-depth consultations were held with the Austrian National Bank (OeNB) and the Financial Market Supervisory Authority.

“The Austrian's savings deposits in Austrian banks are safe“, Gusenbauer reaffirmed. The government maintained regular contacts with all relevant players and observed the trends in the international financial markets very closely. A spokesman of the Chancellor told APA that the government had demonstrated that it responded quickly and flexibly to international developments.

The banks welcomed this step as a first measure to calm down savers. “But it will not even be necessary“, Erste Bank boss Andreas Treichl assured in the ORF programme “Im Zentrum“ (5 October 2008). But also Molterer underlined that no tax money would be used but that the state provided a guarantee that hopefully would never be required or become effective.

From the Austrian perspective, this step was not really necessary. However, a drain of personal savings to Germany should be prevented, Molterer explained, who also plans to coordinate the measures with his counterparts in the EU in the next days. After all, it was a European issue.

According to OeNB Governor Ewald Nowotny, the Austrians hold 24 million savings bank books. Today 22.8 million were covered by the statutory guarantee for savings deposits, i.e. with 20,000 euros per person and bank. “We provide cover for the major part already now“, Nowotny said. ■

Full employment achieved in March

As the EU's statistical office Eurostat informed recently, Austria had registered an unemployment rate of 3.3.% (based on the Eurostat method) in

August. In an EU ranking, Austria was third, behind the Netherlands and Denmark. The EU average was 6.9%.

Minister for Economic Affairs and Labour Martin Bartenstein explained that this rate stood for full employment in Austria. Based on the recently revised unemployment data, full employment had already been registered in Austria in March, Bartenstein told reporters on 1 October 2008. Unemployment continued to decrease country-wide in September. In Austria 183,327 persons were registered as unemployed, i.e. 1.5% less than in the same month of the previous year. Austria benefited from an optimal position to confront the difficult months ahead, the Minister stated, who expects a sharp economic downturn. The two domestic economic research institutes Wifo and IHS issued a significant downward revision of their forecasts of the gross domestic product (GDP), projecting a growth of only 0.9% (Wifo) to 1.2% (IHS) for 2009. A 2.0% growth rate has been predicted for the current year. ■

Austria is top investor in CEECs

Austria plays an increasingly important role as an investor in the Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs). Almost half of Austria's total foreign direct investments go to the CEE region, as a recent study of the Austrian National Bank (OeNB) shows. What's more, “The investment wave expands further into Eastern Europe“, OeNB Director Aurel Schubert (Statistical Department) explained at a presentation of the World Investment Report of UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) in Vienna on 24 September 2008.

In 2006 the domestic companies earned about 7.5 billion euros through foreign direct investments, corresponding to an extraordinary return on equity of 12.5%. In 2007 Austrian enterprises invested for the first time more than 100 billion euros abroad. According to the OeNB, strategic investments in foreign companies had amounted to 80 billion euros only one year earlier.

More than 90% of the investments of the Austrian companies go to Europe, almost 37 billion euros or 46% to the CEECs. Austria boasts to be the largest investor in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia. In 2007 Turkey and Kazakhstan were discovered as new target countries. Austrian companies create 479,000 jobs abroad. ■

Graz: "Romale" for more tolerance

Under the title "Romale08", Graz Academy (Akademie Graz) presents exhibitions, concerts and a symposium to combat anti-Roma prejudice and to shed a more favourable light on this ethnic group. The festival ending on 25 October 2008 was opened with the show "Roma in Bewegung" ("Roma on the Move") documenting the history of the people originating from India, who have been persecuted throughout Europe since the 16th century. At present about 10 million Roma live in Europe.

Besides the Roma exhibition, the art show "Meet your Neighbours" was inaugurated. It showcases exhibits by Delaine Le Bas (England) and Julie Denesha (USA). Le Bas described the situation of the Roma in Great Britain as open racism.

On 30 October 2008, the symposium "Roma – Europe's largest minority" took place at the Karl Franzens University of Graz. The series of events was rounded off with a debate – "From the fringes towards the mainstream? Pathways of integration of the Roma in Europe" – initiated by the weekly "Falter" on 22 October 2008.

www.akademie-graz.at ■

Federal President Fischer opened "Klimt and the Art Show 1908"

The Lower Belvedere in Vienna shows the exhibition "Gustav Klimt and the Art Show 1908" (open up to 18 January 2009) to mark its 100th anniversary. Curator Alfred Weidinger and his team tried to reconstruct the Art Show of 1908 on the basis of photos and plans. It had been planned in 1908 as a parallel event to the celebrations of the 60th jubilee of the accession of Emperor Francis Joseph I. to the throne. Weidinger used the small-format, 100-page catalogue of that exhibition as a guide. Director of Belvedere Gallery Agnes Husslein-Arco described the reconstruction as predominantly successful. The Art Show had influenced and shaped modernism decisively. It covered painting, sculpture, graphic art, crafts, costumes and stage decoration by 176 artists, among them Carl Moll, Max Oppenheimer and Frank Kupka. One third of the participants in the Show were artists.

Some reconstructed exhibition premises as the room of Wiener Werkstätte, the billboard poster room or the Klimt room with the small, ornamental wall pattern designed by Kolo Moser try to re-create the atmosphere. Famous Klimt

paintings such as "The Kiss", "Danae" and "Three Ages of Woman" are, of course, on show. In 1908 only 40,000 visitors attended the exhibition during some months. Now this number will certainly be exceeded several times.

President Heinz Fischer and his wife Margit will be guided through the show by Agnes Husslein-Arco and Alfred Weidinger at the opening on 31 September 2008.

www.belvedere.at ■

Pope Benedict XVI. attends concert of Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra

The seventh edition of the Festival of Sacred Music takes place in Rome from 12 October to 30 November 2008. The most beautiful churches of the Eternal City are the venue of 13 concerts. One of the highlights is the concert of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Christoph Eschenbach in the Basilica San Paolo fuori le Mura (St. Paul's outside the Walls) on 13 October 2008. Pope Benedict XVI. will enjoy the interpretation of Anton Bruckner's Sixth Symphony.

Moreover, the "Youth Orchestra of the Americas" and the "New England Conservatory Orchestra" under Helmuth Rilling will interpret Joseph Haydn's "Harmony Mass" at St. Peter's Basilica on 26 November 2008. ■

Haydn Year 2009: touring exhibition stops in more than 30 countries

"Haydn Goes International" is the title of the touring exhibition recently presented in Eisenstadt (Burgenland). It will be shown in more than in 70 places in 30 countries in the Haydn Year 2009. Besides biographical data, the documentary exhibition also provides information on the places of artistic creation and the compository oeuvre of Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) as well as his era. Moreover, the most important historical events of the Vienna classical period of music are illustrated with a timeline to introduce the visitors to the composer's life against the background of the events of his époque. The pictures of the photo exhibition are by Manfred Horvath.

Walter Reicher, the Haydn Festival manager, is responsible for the concepts of the two shows – documentary and photo exhibition – and also uses texts about the life and work of Haydn to revisit history. The historical and present-day pictures are juxtaposed with contemporary texts,

excerpts from letters and notes but also anecdotes about Haydn's life. In this way a "musical topography tracing the inventor of the symphony and the string quartet" was created, Reicher said. The exhibition started its tour recently. Above all, it will be presented in Austrian embassies in connection with concerts and other events. ■

Hermann Nitsch Museum in Naples

A new museum – the Museo Archivio Laboratorio per le Arti Contemporanee Hermann Nitsch – was opened in Naples on 13 September 2008. The Museo Nitsch was realised by Giuseppe Morra, an art collector from Naples and old friend of the artist, who also participated in some "art actions" of the "Orgy-Mystery Theatre". He had a former industrial complex (with a surface of 1,800m²) converted into a light-flooded museum and an apartment for the artist. Given the circumstances, many of the works on show are linked to Morra and Naples. But also photos of early art actions, including those performed at Vienna's Burgtheater, are presented. In any case the museum provides the visitors with an in-depth overview of the artist's Orgy-Mystery Theatre.

The museum also performs the function of a study centre. It is open to the public from Tuesday to Sunday throughout the year.

www.museonitsch.org, www.nitsch.org ■

Film director Stefan Ruzowitzky received prize "Efebo d'Oro" in Sicily

Austria film director Stefan Ruzowitzky received the international prize "Efebo d'Oro" ("Golden Ephebus") for his film "Die Fälscher" ("The Counterfeiters") in Agrigento on 4 October 2008. The prize was conferred on him by the "Research Centre for Literature and Film" which has selected the best foreign film adaptations of literary texts in the past 30 years.

Ruzowitzky's film is based on the memories of Adolf Burger about the real history of the Nazi's largest money counterfeiting operation during WWII., which was realised under the code name "Aktion Bernhard" ("Operation Bernhard").

In February 2008 Ruzowitzky's film won the Oscar for the best foreign language film – it was the first Oscar for an Austrian contribution in history. "Ruzowitzky is one of the most interesting film directors of the new generation.

His film has been selected by a jury consisting of 60 members. The film impressed us because it is based on a true story", Corrado Catania said, who is responsible for the prize.

Among the film directors receiving "Golden Ephebus" trophies in the past were Mario Monicelli and Giuseppe Tornatore. ■

European Jazz Prize 2008 went to percussionist Han Bennink

Dutch percussionist Han Bennink receives the European Jazz Prize 2008. Other winners of the Hans Koller Prize 2008 are pianist Fritz Pauer (State Prize for Improvised Music), saxophonist Viola Falb (Newcomer of the Year) and guitarist Martin Spitzer (Sideman of the Year). The prize awarding ceremony takes place in the jazz club Porgy & Bess in Vienna on 28 November 2008, where Bennink will give the traditional concert of the European Jazz Prize Winner one night later.

"His curiosity about different sounds has again and again made him embark on exciting experiments with wood and brass wind instruments and on collaborations with musicians expanding the jazz context towards European Improvised Music", the jury explained its decision of awarding the prize to Bennink. He had had "an impact on the genesis of European Free Jazz" and had "over and over developed surprising insights into the realm of jazz and Improvised Music".

The album "Alma" by Martin Reiter (material records) won the title "CD of the Year 2008". The New York Scholarship 2008 goes to saxophonists Barbara Paierl and Fabian Rucker. www.hanskollerpeis.at ■

Torberg at the Jewish Museum Vienna

The Jewish Museum Vienna celebrates the 100th birthday of the writer, critic and translator Friedrich Torberg (1908-1979) with a comprehensive documentary exhibition. Starting with the pre-war world of "Tante Jolesch" ("Aunt Jolesh"), the chapters literature, exile, Cold War, Judaism, Israel, sports and confrontation with Austria's NS past are explored. But also the conflicts surrounding Torberg, who is a controversial public figure in Austria, are addressed. As a child, Torberg, born as Friedrich Ephraim Kantor,

joined the Jewish sports club Hakoah in Vienna. In the parallel club Hagibor in Prague he became the national water polo champion in 1928. He used his knowledge about sports in the sports novel "Die Mannschaft" (1935). He had won renown previously with his first novel "Der Schüler Gerber hat absolviert" (1930) (English translation: "The Examination"). His career took a sudden turn due to his flight from the Nazis. His probably most important literary works were published during his exile in the US (1940-1951): the concentration camp novella "Mein ist die Rache" and "Hier bin ich, mein Vater"; a controversial novel about a Jewish Nazi spy. In 1951 he returned to Vienna, where he published the magazine "FORVM" for the Cultural Freedom Congress (1954-1965), which adopted a strictly anti-Communist position during the Cold War. It prevented for example the anti-Fascist and pro-Communist German writer Bertolt Brecht – who was supported by the liberally minded composer Gottfried von Einem in Salzburg –, from working in Austria after returning from exile in the US. Torberg earned outstanding merits as the translator of Israeli author Ephraim Kishon. Torberg was not only a great water sports athlete but also a football fan. When Matthias Sindelar (nicknamed "paper man"), the light-footed blond forward star of Austria's legendary "Wunder-team" ("miracle team") of the 1930s, died in January 1939 together with his girlfriend Camilla Castagnola from "smoke poisoning" under mysterious circumstances, Torberg wrote one of the most beautiful sports poems in history: "Auf den Tod eines Fußballspielers" ("On the Death of a Football Player").

www.jmw.at ■

Nordic Modernism in Schönberg's Vienna around 1900

The Arnold Schönberg Center presents the international exhibition "Strindberg, Schönberg, Munch. Nordic Modernism in Schönberg's Vienna around 1900" (closing on 18 January 2009). The first presentation of works created by August Strindberg in Austria, including some paintings produced in Upper Austria in the 1890s, is the highlight of the exhibition and illustrates the intellectual and esthetical links to the composers of Vienna Modernism. Strindberg's (soul) landscapes shows similarities to the paintings of Schönberg. Besides the esthetical parallels with the paintings of Schönberg, the artistic creation of

Edvard Munch reflects the significance of the Scandinavian avant-garde for the intelligentsia of the "Vienna around 1900", which has hardly been taken into account in the past. The original manuscripts illustrate the influence of Nordic literary modernism on Schönberg and his circle.

www.schoenberg.at ■

Triumph: Martin Kušej produces the "Weibsteufel" at Akademietheater

The physician and writer Karl Schönherr, who was born in Axams (Tyrol) in 1867 and died in Vienna in 1943, wrote his most famous play "Der Weibsteufel" ("A Devil of a Woman") in 1914. In a hill farming region a woman is married to a weakly peasant who tries to make up for her not exclusively material demands by intensive smuggling. A border patrolman who has to stop the illicit cross-border trading, appears on the scene of this disharmonic relationship. The woman seems to become obsessed with him. Her husband supports the suspicious contacts to transport the hot goods hidden on the farm secretly to the valley. The "devil of a woman" takes over the reins and gets rid of the two men. One man is stabbed to death and the second one is about to mount the scaffold. The ménage à trois is played superbly by the "devil of a woman" Birgit Minichmayr (aged 33) from Pasching near Linz, Werner Wölbern as the "husband" and Nicholas Ofczarek as the "border patrolman". Martin Kušej's production transformed the rough popular play into a contemporary relationship drama.

www.burgtheater.at ■

Styrian autumn festival 2008

"Strategies to avoid unhappiness" is the leitmotiv of the festival "steirischer herbst" in Graz (ending on 26 October 2008). It was still important to do something, to move and change things. The opening took place in the Helmut List Hall, which was transformed into "Volksbad Wagner-Biro-Straße". The installation was created by sculptor Christoph Steinbrenner and photographer Rainer Dempf. This year's festival centre is Styria's Regional Museum Joanneum. The premiere of the German language version of "Melancholia", the new opera by Georg Friedrich Haas, will be a highlight. "musikprotokoll" is devoted to avant-garde music until 12 October 2008.

www.steirischerherbst.at,

<http://oe1.orf.at/musikprotokoll> ■

Chancellor Gusenbauer pays tribute to Austrian athletes

Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer paid tribute to four successful athletes in the Federal Chancellery. Hand biker Wolfgang Schattauer, gold medallist of the Paralympic Games 2008, was awarded the Golden Badge of Honour for Meritorious Service to the Republic of Austria for his world champion title 2006. The Golden Badge of Meritorious Service of the Republic of Austria was conferred on Isabel Fiala, Katharina Luschin and Nikolaus Luschin for the third place in trick riding in the world championship in Aachen in 2006. As “Ambassadors of Austrian Sports“, they had shown in their disciplines that the spotlight should also be turned on so-called “minority sports”, Gusenbauer praised the guests of honour. He described their top performance as an incentive to further develop Austrian sports structures in a successful way: “It must be our common goal in sports policy to ensure that all publicly funded disciplines are competitive at international level and that we boost our resources for the next Olympic Summer Games.“ ■

Austria's homage to German Olympic medallist Matthias Steiner

“After earning Olympic gold in Beijing, Matthias Steiner is granted the Golden Badge of Honour of the Republic of Austria because he is a shining example of Austrian sports and has still close ties with his home country”, Secretary of State for Sports Reinhold Lopatka stressed at the reception staged for the super-heavyweight lifter winning Olympic gold for Germany held in Obersulz (Weinviertel/Lower Austria). Steiner, 25, was three times Austrian champion and medal winner at junior world and European championships. In the heavyweight category he became number seven still in the Olympic Games in Athens 2004. Steiner then had a dispute with his sports club, which had dismissed his much-appreciated coach Maged Salama. Steiner was banned for three years. He moved to Leimen (Germany) to live with his wife Susann. She died in a car accident in July 2007. In hospital he promised his dying wife that he would continue to compete for an Olympic medal. After Athens the heavy athlete gained about 40 kilos, became a German citizen at the beginning of 2008 and is now the “strongest man in the world“. During the touching winners’

ceremony in Beijing he held up the photo of his late wife, to whom he dedicated the gold medal. Besides, the Austrian Weightlifting Association represented the most successful discipline of the Olympic Summer Games, earning 11 medals since 1896. www.matthias-steiner.net ■

Volleyball 2011: Men's European Championship in Austria

Austria and the Czech Republic will host the Men's European Volleyball Championship in Vienna, Innsbruck Prague and Liberec from 9 to 18 September 2011 – another proof of Austria's good image as a host of mass sports events. After the EURO 2008, Austria will not only host the Women's World Ice Hockey Championship 2009, the Men's European Handball Championship 2010 and the World Alpine Ski Championships 2013 but will also play an important role in the international sports scene by organising the Men's European Volleyball Championship. ■

“SPORT:DIALOGUE – Olympia“

Austrian summer sports have “to learn the lesson of Beijing for London“. At the “SPORT:DIALOGUE“ (e.g. with judo silver medallist of Beijing, Ludwig Paischer) held in the House of Sports the main topic for debate was to improve funding for elite sports. Together with the sports associations represented in the Olympic Summer Games in London 2012, the Secretariat of State for Sports is evaluating the past Olympic Games to improve the use of financial resources for sports in talks about future prospects. An expert panel with ÖOC Secretary-General Heinz Jungwirth, Chairman of the BSO's Expert Panel Gottfried Forsthuber, performance assessor Hans Holdaus and coach Gunnar Prokop stressed the necessity of a reform of training for coaches and of improved controlling of funds in the sports sector. [SPORT:DIALOG](#) ■

Christiane Soeder best cyclist

With the silver medal for the Time Trial event at the World Road Race Championship in Varese (Upper Italy) Christiane Soeder, 33, achieved the greatest success in Austria's women's cycling. World championship bronze in Stuttgart 2007 and the recent silver medal make her the leading medallist of the Austria Cycling Association (ÖRV). ■