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Economic policy package adopted

The new National Council (1st chamber of Parliament) adopted an economic policy package in its constitutive meeting on 28 October 2008. The “former” coalition parties – the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) and the People’s Party (ÖVP) – as well as the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ) voted in favour of the package, whose main beneficiaries are small and medium-sized companies (SMEs). It will guarantee adequate financing and allow SMEs to make necessary investments with state subsidies. The aim is to cushion the adverse effects of the financial crisis, to safeguard jobs and consolidate Austria’s position as a business location.

The centrepiece of the package is “1 billion for SMEs” – this amount is to be made available to SMEs in 2009 and 2010. As far as the funds for 2009 are concerned, 105 million euro will be provided from the government budget, 500 million euros will be earmarked for raising credit limits and 400 million euros will be reserved for additional guarantees. A similar allocation of funds is likely in 2010.

A SME Fund – endowed with 80 million euros – will be set up within “aws” (Austria Wirtschaftsservice/Austrian Economic Service) for two years. The Fund is to invest between 300,000 and 1 billion euros in companies during a period of ten years. In turn, it will be given rights of co-determination, control, inspection and profit sharing. 100 to 200 million euros annually are to be made available from funding programmes of the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Investment Fund (EIF). The federal government will provide 25 billion euros for an internationalisation campaign. The research sector will benefit from an additional 100 million euros granted as long-term loans. 100 million euros have been earmarked for energy projects. Energy-intensive companies receive free CO2 certificates. As infrastructure is another priority of the package, railway projects should for example be advanced. From 2009 to 2012 about 700 million euros of fresh money will be injected into railway projects, in particular the modernisation of railway stations. For the road sector a budget of 200 million euros has been projected. To facilitate the granting of loans for owner-occupied homes, the maximum amount of government premiums on building-society deposits is increased from 1,000 to 1,200 euros per person and year. The

government’s respective annual expenditure will total about 20 million euros. ■

“Austria talks” with cash check

A top item on the agenda of the “Austria talks” held by the five parliamentary parties on 29 October 2008 was the “cash check” on the state of the national budget presented by Minister of Finance Wilhelm Molterer and Secretary of State Christoph Matznetter. The budget deficit is expected to increase significantly in the wake of the economic crisis. According to the October forecast of the Economic Research Institute (Wifo), it will rise to about 2.4% of the GDP in the current legislative period. This scenario has been based on the assumption of a total tax relief of 2.7 billion euros as well as special pension rules for heavy workers (“Hacklerregelung”), the reformed family allowance and abolished university fees. However, Molterer did not rule out the possibility of surpassing the 3-percent limit defined by the EU in the next years and a deficit of more than 4% in 2012. This could cause obstacles in the coalition talks between the SPÖ and the ÖVP. SPÖ leader Werner Faymann questioned whether the Maastricht deficit limit of 3% should still be considered taboo if jobs were at risk. The Freedom Party (FPÖ), the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ) and the Greens shared his view. ÖVP Chairman Josef Pröll pled vehemently for observing the EU deficit threshold. Like Molterer he warned against incurring unnecessary debts.

Faymann highlighted the latest Wifo forecast predicting an increase in unemployment by up to 100,000 to 300,000 jobseekers by 2012. This was not acceptable. It had to be shown that not only the banks but also the employees were helped. Faymann said that in the government talks it was necessary to clarify which parts of the tax reform could be advanced so as to strengthen the purchasing power substantially.

With regard to economic growth, Wifo expects a plus of only 0.9% in 2009 and of up to 2.7% in 2013. A 2% growth rate and about 208,000 jobless have been projected for the current year. ■

Government talks: the SPÖ and the ÖVP want to step up the tempo

Future budget goals and the gloomy economic prospects were also discussed in the direct coalition talks between the SPÖ and the ÖVP.

In the second large round of talks on 30 October 2008 the two party leaders Werner Faymann and Josef Pröll agreed on drawing up some sort of budget framework and to generally step up the tempo in forming a government. Despite the manifest differences on economic policy (key topic: maximum budget deficit of 3%), SPÖ Chairman Faymann praised the “constructive talks”. ÖVP Chairman Pröll drew attention to the working group on finance which had to clarify the underlying budgetary conditions by involving the party leaders. ■

Austria celebrated national holiday

On 26 October Austria celebrated its national holiday (Declaration of Neutrality on 26 October 1955). Following the traditional wreath-laying ceremony in the crypt of Äußeres Burgtor (“Outer Gate” to Hofburg), the federal government held a special session of the Council of Ministers. In his address Federal Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer praised the advantages of EU membership, especially against the background of the current financial crisis. The euro was the only currency against which there was no speculation, it had established itself as the strongest currency in the market and acted as a stability mechanism, Gusenbauer explained. The Chancellor also stressed the significance of the social market economy. Many people had to realise that social equilibrium was a prerequisite for a functioning market economy. Gusenbauer pledged his firm commitment to Austria’s neutrality.

The President’s Office, the Federal Chancellery and various ministries held an “Open Day” also this year. The Federal Chancellery achieved a new visitors’ record with more than 10,000 people.

The federal army staged a presentation of its equipment and services as well as the swearing-in ceremony of new recruits in Heldenplatz.

In his evening TV statement Federal President Heinz Fischer addressed the financial crisis and underlined the importance of the EU and the strong common euro. Fischer called on the coalition parties to develop a “new working style” and to form a government as soon as possible. ■

Vienna’s former Mayor Helmut Zilk died aged 81

Vienna’s former Mayor Helmut Zilk (SPÖ) died from a heart failure aged 81 years at a hospital in Vienna on 24 October 2008. The full-blooded

politician headed the City of Vienna from 1984 to 1994, after serving as a minister of education and having earned himself a reputation as a committed journalist. Heads of state and representatives of all parties mourned Zilk’s death and expressed their condolences to his wife, operetta and musical star Dagmar Koller, as well as his son (first marriage). Helmut Zilk was born in Vienna on 9 June 1927. In 1955 the pedagogue and German language expert changed to the radio, where he became programme director (1967-1974) and created legendary programmes, such as “Stadtgespräche” and “In eigener Sache”. In 1979 Zilk was appointed Executive Councillor for Culture and in 1983 Minister of Education. He enjoyed great popularity in his tenure as Vienna’s mayor (1984 to 1994). In 1993 Zilk became a victim of the first letter bombing series, sustaining severe injuries to his left hand. Zilk was a passionate Viennese and Austrian. He could be “boisterous but was also a good listener” (©President Heinz Fischer) and a man of dialogue. Zilk was firmly committed to reconciliation with Israel and shared a deep and long friendship with the late former Mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek.

Helmut Zilk will be laid to rest in a tomb of honour in Vienna’s Central Cemetery on 8 November 2008. ■

Austrian Sahara hostages are free

The two Austrian Sahara hostages are free. Wolfgang Ebner (51) and Andrea Kloiber (43) from Salzburg were received by Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik and a delegation in Mali’s capital Bamako on 31 October 2008. They arrived in Vienna on 1 November 2008. According to medical experts, they were “in surprisingly good health”. Federal Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer was “happy and relieved” about their liberation. Gusenbauer thanked all governments that had contributed to their release, in particular Mali’s President Amadou Toumani Toure. ■

Federal Chancellor Gusenbauer at Asia-Europe summit in Beijing

Federal Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer called for an international regulation of banking and financial markets at the Asia-EU summit in Beijing on 24 October 2008. The summit participants pled for a close cooperation of the international community in combating the financial crisis. ■

AUA sale: privatisation mandate extended to year-end

On 29 October 2008 the federal government extended the privatisation mandate for the Austrian Airlines (AUA) and agreed in the Council of Ministers to provide financial aid of up to 500 million euros. It is not yet clear whether this amount will be used for debt relief or a capital increase or another government subsidy. The request for state funding for AUA read as follows: "To support the privatisation process in the interest of Austria, after conclusion of the negotiations ÖIAG should – in addition to using liquid funds – take supporting measures based on adequate financing methods amounting up to 500 million euros to ensure that AUA will remain in Austrian hands." Another resolution by the Council of Ministers is required to approve the actual distribution of funds. The Austrian state holding company ÖIAG, which is still the majority shareholder, is responsible for privatisation. The competent government official is incumbent Minister of Finance Wilhelm Molterer.

On 29 October 2008 ÖIAG officially confirmed that bids had been submitted by German Lufthansa and the Russian S7. According to a press release, the offer of Lufthansa "conformed to the process", the bid submitted by S7 was "examined with regard to the economic and legal conditions as well as process conformity". ÖIAG CEO Peter Michaelis stated that – in accordance with the government resolution – the process would be continued and a decision would be taken in the next weeks.

The AUA sale to Lufthansa had to be concluded by early December. The deadline set by the German airline for the take-over of the 41.56 percent stake of ÖIAG in the Austrian Airlines ends on 3 December 2008, the weekly "Format" informed in its issue of 31 October 2008. In the meantime, ÖIAG has started to work intensively on a solution for AUA that conforms to the EU requirements for granting subsidies or debt assumption.

According to "Format", possible options are a capital increase still before the sale, the split-off into a separate company assuming AUA's debt of 500 million euros or a solution involving AUA's creditor banks. Lufthansa boss Wolfgang Mayrhuber insisted on a "fair distribution" of AUA's past debt burden. ■

Bank package entered into force – Kommunalkredit to be nationalised

The two governing parties – the Social Democrats (SPÖ) and the People's Party (ÖVP) – reached an agreement on further details about reciprocal bank guarantees and strict state requirements on 29 October 2008, by which the comprehensive bank rescue package was finalised. The financial volume of the aid package totals 100 billion euros. By investing 15 billion euros, the government can acquire shares in banks and insurance companies via a new subsidiary of the state holding company ÖIAG. Experts are of the opinion that in Austria all system-relevant banks as well as large insurance companies will take advantage of this state aid.

The listed Erste Group showed the way. It was the first domestic large bank making use of the government's rescue package by selling investment capital amounting to 2.7 billion euros to the Republic of Austria. Similar measures are being considered by Raiffeisen, BAWAG, Volksbanken and in particular the Carinthian Hypo Group Alpe Adria, as these banks informed. Bank Austria wants "to take time to examine" this step. Decisions are expected to be taken in the next days and weeks.

In return Erste Group will pay the state fixed interest of 8% for at least five years up to full repayment. Thanks to this "precautionary" measure strengthening equity, the ongoing loan business is expected to remain in full swing. Other than in the case of Kommunalkredit, this has not implied partial nationalisation, Erste boss Andreas Treichl emphasised on 30 October 2008, after the bank announced a new record profit for the third quarter. Kommunalkredit is, however, in a completely different situation. The nationalisation of the domestic financial provider for the municipal sector is being discussed. Before the editorial close no clear information was available whether Dexia would sell its almost 50% share in the bank majority-owned by Volksbank AG or not. The Belgian-French Dexia has not yet provided any comments.

The daily "Kurier" informed on 31 October 2008 about a possible division of Kommunal-kredit. Its Eastern European activities could be taken over by Dexia, while the domestic business could become the sole responsibility of the government-owned Volksbank. The negotiations about the future of Austria's eighth largest bank were continued on 3 November 2008. ■

Federal Chancellery: new digital
Service Centre: HELP.gv.at

On the national holiday on 26 October the new Service Centre:HELP.gv.at was opened in the Federal Chancellery (Hofburg, entrance in Schauflergasse) by the Federal Minister for Women, Media and Regional Policy who is also competent for e-government, Heidrun Silhavy, and Secretary of State Andreas Schieder. In this state-of-the-art citizen service centre all interested citizens may inform themselves about e-government and the handling of online procedures on weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. In addition, they may have a citizen card functionality added to their electronic health insurance card.

As Minister Silhavy explained, the aim of the new Service Centre is to offer “the best opportunities to the citizens to get into touch with the administration as a service provider. For the better the administration works, the easier it becomes to make political decisions transparent and comprehensible“. In the meantime most interested people are familiar with the digital guide through the Austrian administration “Help.gv.“. About half a million hits were registered per month. Thanks to the citizen card, contacts with the authorities could be handled in a simple and unbureaucratic way 24 hours a day. “Have your health insurance card converted into a citizen card still today“, the Federal Minister called on the numerous visitors. Simple and barrier-free access were a key concern, Silhavy stated. The website of the Federal Chancellery had been re-designed accordingly and the new version had won several awards. “Using simultaneous interpretation provided by a sign language interpreter, today we show – not only symbolically – that barrier-free access is not just a meaningless slogan.“ According to the Minister, people without a computer should also profit from barrier-free access. The Service Centre:HELP.gv.at would not only give them access to a PC but also offer conventional counselling. “Our aim is to ensure that the range of our services meets the requirements of the population and is accepted“, Silhavy explained. Secretary of State Schieder also stressed that public service meant to “offer optimal services to the citizens“. This was the short formula for all administrative reforms planned. “Modern technology offers a wealth of opportunities to reduce the workload on the traditional public service but also to protect the

nerves of the citizens“, Schieder concluded humorously.

Silhavy and Schieder took the “host” of the Federal Chancellery, Director-General Manfred Matzka, in their midst and jointly cut the red-white-red ribbon to open the Service Centre:HELP.gv.at. ■

www.digitales.oesterreich.gv.at

Woman of the Year Award 2008 to
former hostage Ingrid Betancourt

Federal Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer conferred the “Woman of the Year Award 2008“ to the French-Canadian politician Ingrid Betancourt in a ceremony staged at Palais Coburg in Vienna. This prize is granted in the framework of the Women’s World Awards, which will be presented officially in Vienna only on 5 March 2009. Betancourt will not attend this event as she wants to withdraw for some months to write down her story. The former presidential candidate was freed in a spectacular operation only last summer after having been held hostage for six years by the FARC rebels in the Columbian jungle. According to the initiators of the awards, former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and Austrian PR expert Georg Kindel, Betancourt had been granted the award as her fate had moved the world and for becoming a model for millions of people.

In his presentation speech Federal Chancellor Gusenbauer condemned violence as a political instrument. “The history of mutual retaliation“ that could be observed in many places of this world today had “never been an adequate foundation for lasting peace. Only if work with the perpetrators beyond the regular judiciary is added to work with the victims, can the reconciliation you called for take place at the graves of the dead and with the psychically mutilated“. The Chancellor described the award winner as a “survivor of senseless terror as well as an ambassador of hope for all those still living in and suffering from hopelessness“. Every year hundreds of thousands of people were disappearing under cruel circumstances all over the world, becoming the pawn in the hands of various machineries of power. “I may present this award to you personally and on behalf of all those suffering a similar fate. It is a sign of solidarity with an unyielding woman“.

On 27 October 2008 Ingrid Betancourt was also received by Federal President Heinz Fischer

in his office at Hofburg. The extensive talks did not only address her captivity of several years but also the situation in Columbia and Latin America in general.

Ingrid Betancourt reiterated her call on the international community not to forget all those people who were still held hostage by rebels and to continue the efforts to liberate them. ■

State Prize for Architecture in the category "Tourism and Leisure"

"Architecture is gaining increasing importance in the tourist and leisure industry and has developed into a tourist offer in great demand. Moreover, architects and building sponsors assume great responsibility as they shape our environment and our living space not only in the present but also for future generations", Secretary of State in the Federal Ministry of Economy and Labour Christine Marek stressed at the presentation ceremony of the State Prize for Architecture 2008 at Palais Eschenbach on 22 October 2008. The prize went to tatanka ideenvertriebsgmbh, Mils und Gogl+Partner, Linz, for the renovation and enlargement of the Hotel "Schwarzer Adler" in Kitzbühel (Tyrol). The architects' task was to create a roof terrace with a swimming pool and a roofed kitchen block on the hotel built in the 1980s. In this process, the existing attic storey was restructured to accommodate new hotel rooms. The jury praised the architects' "courage to commit themselves to a markedly contemporary artistic form, without recurring to Alpine clichés".

The special prize "Old & New" was conferred on cukrowicz nachbaur architekten zt gmbH from Bregenz and on the City of Dornbirn (Vorarlberg) for the revamped municipal swimming pool in Dornbirn.

All new building, restructuring and enlargement projects in the tourist and leisure sector – from accommodation and catering, spa and wellness facilities as well as leisure and theme parks to rope railway stations located in Austria – could compete for the State Prize for Architecture 2008. The State Prize for Architecture is awarded every two years, e.g. by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Austrian Architecture Foundation, based on the recommendations of an independent expert jury.

www.staatspreis-architektur.at ■

Wien Modern 2008

Since its foundation in 1988 by Claudio Abbado and Lothar Knessl, the "Wien Modern" festival has been one of the internationally most renowned platforms for contemporary music trends. This year's programme running until 16 November 2008 comprises 72 events at 21 venues, including 41 world premiers and 14 premiers in Austria. Karlheinz Stockhausen, Enno Poppe and Peter Ablinger are featured in "composer portraits".

The festival section "Music & Brains" explores the question how music is created in the human brain and what effect it has. In five projects leading international neurologists will give insights into the state of art of brain research and enter into dialogue with music creators and the audience. Other programme highlights: film artist, musician and composer Tony Conrad (living in New York), Israeli composer Chaya Czernowin and a composers' marathon with young talents from Vienna. This year the programme section "Music & Film" brings together the film "Die freudlose Gasse" ("Joyless Street") and composer Burkhard Stangl. The acknowledged silent era classic (1925) by film director G. W. Pabst and scriptwriter Willy Haas – starring the actors Asta Nielsen, Werner Krauß and Greta Garbo – was excellently reconstructed by the Munich Film Museum. The dramaturgy of the film was changed soon after the premiere, e.g. through censors' interventions. www.wienmodern.at ■

Paul Klee exhibition in Salzburg

The Museum der Moderne (MdM) on Mönchsberg in Salzburg presents the sensational exhibition "Paul Klee. Melody/Rhythm/Dance" up to 1 February 2009. Key works of the German-Swiss expressionist, constructivist, cubist and surrealist (1879-1940) are on show. For a long time Klee could not decide whether to become a musician or a painter but then decided in favour of the visual art: "Music is my lover, but I embrace painting as a goddess of the brushes smelling of oil only because she is my wife". His beloved music is running like a red thread through his oeuvre both in formal and thematic terms. Structural analogies between colours and beats as well as landscapes and keys depicted with mostly fine, filigree strokes are typical of Klee's avant-garde oeuvre in the early days of modernism, of

which also depicts polyphone composition techniques on predominantly small-sized canvases or children's dolls from plaster and fabric form part. The show presents a total of 200 exhibits, 165 by Klee and 35 by contemporaries like the painting composer Arnold Schönberg and Klee's artistically like-minded friends Wassily Kandinsky, Johannes Itten and Josef Matthias Hauer. In an auditorium the visitors may listen to Klee's favourite music – Bach, Mozart, Rossini, Verdi und Hindemith – as well as original quotations by Klee on music. Didactically well-structured playing grounds for reproducing and analysing works of Klee have been installed in a children's room.

In 1937 Klee was represented in the defamatory Nazi exhibition "Degenerate Art" in Munich, which was also shown in Salzburg in 1938. The current exhibition in Salzburg encompasses the late work of the artist, who lost all teaching assignments in Germany in 1933 and fled to Switzerland. This artistic period culminated in his painting "The Drummer Boy" (1940). In this sinister painting, the artist tried to ban the big disaster.

A comprehensive catalogue has been published to accompany this important exhibition, which had been conceived in the framework of a one-year partnership between Bern and Salzburg on the occasion of EURO 2008.

www.museumdermoderne.at ■

Jewish Film Festival Vienna 2008

For 17 years the Jewish Film Festival has considered it its mission to cover a wide spectrum of themes – from the broad historical foundation of Jewish film culture to pulsating contemporary productions. The Austrian Film Archives have supported the festival as a cooperation partner for several years. Since 2007 the Metro cinema – one of Vienna's most charming venues – has hosted the festival running from 13 to 27 November 2008. In parallel, films are screened at Votivkino from 14 to 20 November 2008, and at De France cinema from 21 to 27 November 2008. Moreover, a new venue was found on the "matzo island" (the historic centre of Jewish life in Vienna): the Jewish Theatre in Nestroyhof. This year the programme offers four thematic sections, i.e. the retrospective "Yiddish Cinema – the pioneers Sidney M. Goldin & Joseph Seiden" curated by the Austrian Film Archives; "Tribute to Otto Tausig – emigration and return"; "Focus on Israel

and Palestine" as well as numerous premiers of international and Austrian productions.

www.filmarchiv.at; www.jfw.at ■

Vienna: Prize of Honour of the Austrian Book Trade to Paul Lendvai

The co-publisher and editor-in-chief of the quarterly "Europäische Rundschau" as well as director of the programme "Europastudio" produced by the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF), Paul Lendvai, 79, will receive the "Prize of Honour of the Austrian Book Trade for Tolerance in Thought and Action" on 6 November 2008. The prize has been granted since 1990 to authors who distinguished themselves by advocating tolerance towards neighbouring countries with different languages and cultures in their works and through their personal commitment, contributing to peaceful coexistence in Europe.

Lendvai was born in Budapest in 1929. He was persecuted by the Nazis due to his Jewish origin. Later he was interned in Communist Hungary and prohibited from exercising his profession. He emigrated to Austria in 1956 and became an Austrian citizen in 1959. Paul Lendvai won renown as one of the most well-informed journalists writing on Central and Eastern European topics for "Presse", the "Financial Times" and pioneering books, such as "Antisemitismus ohne Juden" ("Anti-Semitism without Jews"). www.lendvai.at ■

Vienna: Gemma Salem shows her adaptations of Anton Chekhov

Gemma Salem, the playwright and director from Paris, has been living predominantly in Vienna since 1991. She did not only write important prose on Thomas Bernhard and Franz Schubert but also authored short dramas based on six stories by Anton Chekhov (superbly translated by Anne-Marie Emeder). She produced them under the title "Der gute Misanthrop" ("The Good Misanthropist") at Theater Center Forum and Sargfabrik. The amusing gems fascinate with slapstick and word plays, reveal human weaknesses and in general depict a society in transition. The actors are brilliant, among them Georg Kusztrich and the outstanding beauty Eva Christina Binder. Gemma Salem appears in a small role, that of the wise Tatar. www.datonet.at/offenestheater ■

Austrian athletes 2008

Thomas Morgenstern and Mirna Jukic became the "Athletes of the Year 2008". About 1,500 guests from sports, politics and the economy and, last but not least, Federal President Heinz Fischer congratulated also the other winners Thomas Geierspichler, Andrea Scherney, Christian Kornhauser and Matthias Lanzinger at the Sporthilfe gala held in the Vösendorf Event Pyramide. Thomas Morgenstern outshone Ludwig Paischer und Gregor Schlierenzauer in the selection of the sports journalists, whom he had convinced with his great achievements in the past season, his leadership in the overall World Cup standings with ten victories (six in a row at the beginning of the season), and team gold at the Ski Flying World Championships. Swimmer Mirna Jukic, who triumphed at the Olympic Games in Beijing, received the trophy from ski ace Mario Matt. The bronze medallist of Beijing won the title "Austrian Female Athlete of the Year" for the second time after 2002. The Viennese swimmer came in as the winner before canoer Violetta Oblinger-Peters and cyclist Christiane Soeder. The selection of the "Team of the Year" was unquestioned. The golden team of the Ski Flying World Championships – Martin Koch, Andreas Kofler, Thomas Morgenstern, Gregor Schlierenzauer – was ranked first. The second place goes to the table tennis aces of SVS Niederösterreich before the beach volleyball duo Doris and Steffi Schwaiger. The "Athletes of the Year with Disabilities" are track and field title holder Andrea Scherney and Thomas Geierspichler, winner of the wheelchair race. The ranking of the Special Olympics was won by Christian Kornhauser (e.g. gymnastics), Ümit Korkmaz (football) became the "Rookie of the Year". ■

Austria's Anti-Doping Act is very strict by EU comparison

Recent doping incidents affecting Austria have made it necessary that the judiciary, NADA Austria (National Anti-Doping Agency) and the sports clubs adopt a tough stance. The federal government has paved the way for a more efficient anti-doping combat by a more stringent new Anti-Doping Act and by establishing the independent NADA Austria. The consequences are more money, more information, more checks and more efficient sanctions under criminal law as

well as in shifting the responsibility regarding doping offences from the sports clubs to the National Anti-Doping Agency. A country comparison with Germany, Italy or France shows that Austria has a modern Anti-Doping Act after tightening the penal provisions and covering both blood and gene doping. The legal situation in Austria – the possession and administering of illegal doping substances has become punishable, blood and gene doping are covered, athletes will be prosecuted under sports law but not criminal law – is similar to that of almost all EU Member States. In Austria fines of up to 180,000 euros may be imposed, exceeding the level of fines in the aforementioned countries. A four-country comparison shows that athletes can be punished for doping only in Italy. In France athletes may not be punished for taking doping substances but for offences in the context of doping checks. Unlike in Italy and France, in Austria the possession of doping substances "for the purpose of doping in sport" is already punishable. Especially with regard to blood and gene doping, Austria is one step ahead and listed these methods explicitly in the Anti-Doping Act. Thanks to its anti-doping provisions and sanctions of up to five years of imprisonment and high fines, Austria stands international comparison if all legal possibilities are exhausted. ■

Table tennis: Austria is clear winner of Austrian Open

The Austrian table tennis team clearly won the team competition of the Austrian Open in Salzburg. The Austrians beat Japan by a clear 3:0, after victories by Werner Schlager, Chen Weixing and Chen Weixing/Robert Gardos in the men's doubles. In the men's competitions European champion Timo Boll gave a convincing performance. The German scored an unrivalled 4:0 final victory (7,4,8,8) over the Taiwanese Chuang Chih-Yuan. The women's finals were won with 4:1 (-8,5,7,8,5) by the Chinese Li Qian, competing for Poland, against the Hungarian Krisztina Toth. Werner Schlager was responsible for another record. Following his triumph in the team competition, Austria's world and European champion became the first European to achieve tournament victories in the individual, the double and team events in the ITTF Pro Tour. ■