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The editorial team
wishes all loyal readers
of News from Austria
a peaceful and happy New Year 2009!

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Editor: Dr. Franz Putz, tel. ++43/1/53115-2579, fax ++43/1/53115-4274, e-mail: franz.putz@bka.gv.at.
Dispatch: Division VII/2, Ms. Irene Bucher, tel. ++43/1/53115-2958, fax ++43/1/53115-2880, e-mail: irene.bucher@bka.gv.at.
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Chancellor Faymann presented his programme to Parliament

On 3 December 2008 – only one day after the new federal government had been sworn in – Chancellor Werner Faymann presented his programme for the next five years to Parliament.

In his government declaration of almost one hour, Faymann stressed by way of introduction that the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) and the People's Party (ÖVP) had many common goals and were willing and ready to cooperate and to reach political compromises. To find a common denominator was the very nature of democracy, Faymann said. He described the fight against the economic crisis, the safeguarding of jobs, the promotion of social justice as well as the commitment to the European Union as priorities on the government's agenda.

Faymann pointed out that the situation was serious but warned against excessive pessimism: "We can be a bit more optimistic than the commentators try to make us believe." The Chancellor also highlighted that economic policy packages had been adopted and that the tax reform had been advanced to 2009, which would help to reduce the tax burden, particularly on mid-sized companies.

Faymann stated that the socially weak were a main concern as they should not face ruin through no fault of their own due to the financial crisis. "People but not sales figures or profit must be the decisive criterion of a successful policy." The guaranteed minimum income would be realised quickly, the Chancellor assured. Faymann also drew attention to the numerous measures benefitting families. He stressed that the reform of the health system would be "a top priority" of the government. New employment potentials as well as strategies to ease the financial burden on the factor "labour" were, for example, avenues to be explored in the combat against unemployment. More financial resources were made available for research and development. The creation of new childcare places was promoted and the "successful pilot test" of the New Middle School would be further developed. The future immigration policy had to be adjusted in particular to the interests of Austria and the domestic labour market, the Chancellor underlined. A clear commitment to the Austrian Constitution and legal order was a prerequisite for immigration. With regard to the pension reform Faymann said that only a reporting duty but no

automatic mechanisms would be introduced if life expectancy and other parameters changed.

The Chancellor placed strong emphasis on the "unconditional" commitment to the "construction of a united Europe and Austria's membership in the EU" – especially in this difficult economic situation. The Treaty of Lisbon remained the basis for the EU's capacity to act. He expected the Union to intensify its efforts in the social sector as well as in climate and environmental protection. ■

Chancellor Faymann: no stop sign in the battle against unemployment

Chancellor Werner Faymann described the battle against growing unemployment as the most serious challenge of the financial crisis. "The order of the day is that there must never be a stop sign in the combat against unemployment", he stressed in a discussion with the press in an Austrian TV programme on 7 December 2008. Regarding the adoption of another economic package, the Chancellor stated that one had to act like a fireman: "As much water as necessary to extinguish the fire, or even more." The economic package worth 5 billion euros was Europe's second largest (based on the GDP). If necessary one had to dip deeper into the pocket. To put the finances of the health insurance institutions on a healthy footing, a merger was possible. There were no plans to raise taxes and contributions. ■

Asylum: new rules on humanitarian right of residence under review

On 10 December 2008, Minister of the Interior Maria Fekter submitted the new draft regulation governing the right of residence for humanitarian reasons for review. The Länder should become responsible for "old" cases (in Austria since 1 January 2003). A pledge to assume liability for the subsistence costs of the asylum seeker will become mandatory. The humanitarian aspects of more recent cases are examined in the standard residence/asylum procedures. ■

Social donations are tax deductible

The tax deductibility of donations announced by Finance Minister Pröll will apply especially to money given to social institutions. Details are being discussed. The volume of donations in Austria in 2008 is estimated at 430 million euros. ■

Federal Chancellor Faymann at EU summit in Brussels

At the summit meeting of the EU heads of state and government in Brussels on 11/12 December 2008, Austria was for the first time represented by Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann and Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger. Key subjects were economic measures, climate protection and the EU Reform Treaty.

The basic principles of a European stimulus package against the economic and financial crisis were adopted. The volume of the package will amount to 1.5% of the total economic output of the EU or about 200 billion euros. Chancellor Faymann stated that “multiplier” and “psychological” effects could be expected if the Union was taking a tough stance and if every EU Member State helped to stimulate the economy.

The major share of the funds – 170 billion euros or 12% of the gross domestic product (GDP) – should come from the national economic programmes of the EU members, measures previously taken or announced would be taken into account in calculating the contribution. The European Investment Bank and the EU should inject 50% each of the remaining 30 billion euros. Faymann basically also supported the planned reallocation of 5 billion euros from reserves of the EU budget to infra-structure projects. It would be closely examined whether Austria was also benefiting from this measure.

Two economic packages (amounting to 1.9 billion euros for 2009 and 2010) had been laid down in the Austrian government’s programme. The amount available climbs to 5 billion euros if the tax reform is taken into account.

The heads of state and government also reached an agreement regarding climate protection. The goals – 20% less CO₂ emissions, a 20%-share of renewable energies and 20% less energy consumption by 2020 – remained undisputed. To realise them, a compromise had, however, to be worked out. Some countries, for example, are granted emission exemptions. The main concern are energy-intensive industries producing e.g. steel, aluminium, cement, glass and chemicals. They will continue receiving certificates that are free of charge up to 100% to prevent them from moving out of the EU due to costly climate requirements. However, the average CO₂ emission of the cleanest 10% of the companies is to be used as a yardstick. Industrial plants with higher emissions are to buy the difference in an

auction of emission allowances. The remaining sectors will have to pay only for 70% (instead of the previously planned 100%) of the emission rights in 2020. The poorer Eastern European countries are to receive 12% of the proceeds from emissions trading as from 2013. EU Council President Nicolas Sarkozy referred to a “historic agreement“, Federal Chancellor Faymann to a “remarkable success“. 80% of Austria’s goals had been realised, more than half of the domestic industrial plants affected would be relieved to hear that. Currently there were about 200,000 jobs in sectors which were threatened by relocation, including 80,000 jobs in production facilities affected by emissions trading due to their size. 50 to 90% of them would be exempted due to their high technical production standards and therefore relatively low CO₂ emissions, Faymann said. He also emphasised Austria’s pioneering role in this field (e.g. voestalpine). Ecological and economic objectives had to be compatible.

Moreover, the EU heads of state and government finally agreed to give concessions to Ireland to allow the Irish to hold a second referendum on the Lisbon Reform Treaty. The principle of “one country, one commissioner” will be upheld. Furthermore, Ireland is to be given guarantees regarding its tax sovereignty and neutrality. ■

Federal President Fischer pays visit to Israel and Palestinian territories

Federal President Heinz Fischer and his wife Margit started their four-day state visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories on 14 December 2008. Among the members of the delegation accompanying them are Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger, Minister of Defence Norbert Darabos, Minister of Education Claudia Schmied and the Vice-President of the Economic Chamber Austria, Richard Schenz. The subjects for debate are the Middle East peace efforts and intensified cooperation between Israel and Austria.

The programme includes meetings with leading politicians in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Ramallah, including Israeli President Shimon Peres and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Other items on the agenda are a visit to the Holocaust Memorial Yad Vashem, the Wailing Wall as well as the Austrian hospice in Jerusalem. Besides, an honorary doctorate of the University of Tel Aviv will be conferred on Fischer. In Tel Aviv the Federal President will open an economic forum. ■

Bank rescue package: green light given by EU Commission

On 9 December 2008, the European Commission approved Austria's 100 billion-euro bank rescue package. As the legal formalities have not been completed, no details were published. It is, however, a fact that Brussels distinguishes between sound banks and distressed lenders. If the latter wish to resort to the package, they have to comply with stricter rules and submit a restructuring plan. Sound banks are only subject to an annual reporting requirement.

The European Commission and Austria agreed on the fundamentals of the bank package: 15 billion euros are earmarked for strengthening the equity base of the banks, while 75 billion euros are allocated to a state guarantee for inter-bank loans. 10 billion euros are available for increasing the guarantees for savings deposits. It also seems to be clear that the banks will have to pay an interest rate of between 7 and 9.3% on the government's equity injections (participation capital). Minister of Finance Pröll welcomed the deal with Brussels, stating that legal certainty for implementing the Austrian bank aid package had been achieved.

In general the EU Commission pled for a rate of remuneration for state aid that increases over time to provide sufficient incentive to the banks affected to exit the government support system. Furthermore, limits for dividend distribution will be introduced. Banks benefiting from a public capital injection may distribute a maximum of 17.5% of the net profit to their owners. The remainder should stay in the enterprise for credit refinancing and strengthening the balance sheet.

Governor of the Austrian National Bank (OeNB) Ewald Nowotny urged that the package should be implemented quickly to ensure its salutary effect on the financial statements for 2008. The large banks reacted cautiously, as the official formal approval had to be awaited. Only then would details on the terms become known. If the banks affected managed to obtain more than 30% of their required capital injections from private investors, this is accepted by the EU Commission as conforming to market requirements and no further conditions would be imposed. The main goal of the measures is to ensure the credit supply for individuals and companies. "A credit crunch would have had decisive and sizeable effects on small and mid-sized companies as well as private savers and house builders", Minister of Finance Pröll stressed. ■

Austrian National Bank expects major recession for 2009

The Austrian National Bank (OeNB) made a significant downward revision of its economic forecast for the next two years. The OeNB predicts a major recession for 2009. The real GDP is likely to shrink by 0.3 percentage points, for 2010 a growth rate of merely 0.8% is expected.

According to OeNB boss Ewald Nowotny, the economic stimulus packages and the tax reform of the federal government could cushion the downturn. If these measures prove useful, a growth effect of 0.5% of the GDP is likely. However, they could also have a major impact on the budget deficit. The government deficit of 2.9% projected by the government for 2010 could climb to 3.4%, informed the OeNB. The unemployment rate based on the EU method of calculation would increase to 4.8% by 2010, exports would drop by 2.7% in 2009. ■

Lufthansa buys AUA

On 5 December 2008 the Austrian state holding company ÖIAG gave the go-ahead for the takeover of AUA (Austrian Airlines) by the German carrier Lufthansa. The agreement to sell ÖIAG's 41.56% stake to Lufthansa has been signed. Austria's interests are to be catered for by a foundation (existing for a minimum of five years). AUA will retain its brand name, its headquarters in Vienna and use Vienna Airport as a hub, particularly for crucial long-distance destinations. On 3 December 2008 the Lufthansa Supervisory Board announced the purchase of the Austrian government's stake in AUA for about 366,000 euros (with the option of investing an additional 162 million euros, depending on the performance of AUA). For the diversified holdings Lufthansa offers 4.44 euros per share; the total amount is 215 million euros. The EU Commission has not yet given the okay for the planned government subsidy of the Republic of Austria amounting to 500 million euros. ■

Austria is fourth richest EU country

According to Eurostat, Austria remained the fourth richest country in the EU also in 2007, after Luxembourg, Ireland and the Netherlands. The GDP per capita was 24% above the EU average. ■

Federal Ministers Schmied and Hahn present Lifelong Learning Award

On 10 December 2008 Minister of Education Claudia Schmied and Minister of Science Johannes Hahn awarded for the first time the Lifelong Learning Awards of the National Agency Lifelong Learning for the qualitatively best and most innovative projects and mobility activities in the framework of the Lifelong Learning Programme. Besides these projects, the success stories of so-called “ambassadors“ were spotlighted, which had become possible thanks to funded stays abroad. Eva Bernat and Sonja Steinlechner became COMENIUS and LEONARDO DA VINCI ambassadors, René Kremser and Alfred Lang ERASMUS and GRUNDTVIG ambassadors.

With its pillars COMENIUS, ERASMUS, LEONARDO DA VINCI and GRUNDTVIG, the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union covers school and university education, occupational (further) training and adult education and promotes projects, partnerships, study periods abroad, traineeships in foreign countries and a lot more. Every year more than 9,000 Austrians participate in these programmes. The National Agency for Lifelong Learning (Schreyvogelgasse 2, A-1010 Vienna, Tel.: 0043/1/53408-0) is responsible for coordinating and realising the EU educational programmes in Austria.

The aim of the newly created award is to highlight the contribution made by projects and mobility activities to lifelong learning. An international jury composed of 20 experts in education, politics and economics nominated the three best projects and mobility activities in each sectoral programme from a wealth of applications. The winners are: the federal commercial college (BHAK) in Vienna’s 10th district with the project “Economics, Physics and Mathematics Using e-Learning Software“ for COMENIUS; the University of Vienna with “NICLAS – New International Constitutional Law Approach Summer School on Freedom, Security & Justice” for ERASMUS; the regional government of Styria (Division for Vocational Schools for Trade) and the vocational school of the Land in Eibiswald with “Edu-Puente estudiantes 2b“ for LEONARDO DA VINCI and the Business Club AUSTRIALIA with “C’you – C’me: Looking both Ways“ for GRUNDTVIG.

www.lebenslanges-lernen.at/Award2008 ■

Theatre of change: Hubsli Kramar’s 3-room anatomy theatre

Indulging in lifelong maladjustment, 60-year old Hubsli Kramar of gigantic build realised important artistic and socio-political projects. In the early 1970s he studied inter alia at Reinhardt Seminar in Vienna; he worked and studied with Jerzy Grotowski in Wroclaw, with Lee Strassberg in Bochum as well as with Alan Wynrode of La Mama in Vienna. He was profoundly shaped by different approaches like the sober-essential art of Polish theatre magician Tadeusz Kantor and the sumptuous life of the Compagnie Jérôme Savary. From all these ingredients Hubsli Kramar mixed his own, very distinct style of acting, directing and producing. Continuously challenging the prevailing social conditions, he founded several theatre groups which were to become legendary, e.g. “SHOWinisten“ in 1980. He was not only responsible for stage direction and production but often also wrote the text and acted as a stage advisor. His work on Konrad Bayer, the writer of “Wiener Gruppe” (“Vienna Group”), who died young, became famous. The wild dada revue “Letzte Lockerung“ (“Final Relaxation”) based on Walter Serner’s text is unforgotten. Later Hubsli Kramar founded “THEATER DIREKT“, worked as a stage director for Vienna’s youth theatre association “Theater der Jugend Wien” and started other theatre projects. Provocative public interventions like his Adolf Hitler performance at the opera ball 2000 caused a stir. He directed and produced one of his favourite plays, Samuel Beckett’s “Waiting for Godot“, several times. In 2002 he staged “Mein Kampf“ (“My Struggle”) by George Tabori with Tina Leisch in the shelter for homeless men in Meldemannstraße in Vienna, where the jobless Hitler resided in his early days. Kramar was responsible for the mis-en-scene of more than 80 stage productions and authored 35 plays himself.

His performance as an actor has also been extraordinary, e.g. in Dieter Berner’s “Alpensaga“ (“Alpine Saga”) starring also Helmut Qualtinger or in Steven Spielberg’s Oscar-winning film “Schindler’s List“. He was magnificent in the role of the hunted Pole “Moltke“ in the episode of the same name of the “Schimanski“ series of the “Tatort” TV thriller (with Götz George playing the title role), which won the Grimme award. In the TV film of film director Elisabeth Scharang “Franz Fuchs – A Patriot“ about the letter bomber from Styria (performed by Karl Markovics)

Kramar convinced with his sensitive interpretation of Chief Inspector Peringer.

Kramar received several awards, e.g. the Kainz medal in 1985, the Gustav Gründgens Prize in 2000 and in 2003 – together with Tina Leisch – the Nestroy Theatre Prize for the best off-production. In 1989 he received the German Cabaret Prize (“Deutscher Kleinkunstpreis”) with “Theater Wilde Mischung“ (“Wild Mix Theatre”). Since 2006 Hubsi Kramar – who has always been enthusiastic about “discovering and cultivating barren theatrical space” has run the “3-room anatomy theatre – open art rooms for communication, art and culture“ in Beatrixgasse 11 in Vienna, near the University of Music. The venue consists in a dissecting room, an anatomy room and an auditorium of the former Department for Veterinary Medicine – rooms emanating a peculiarly cruel and at the same time poetic power. It is here that Vienna’s most breathtaking theatre productions crossing borders and migrating between genres have been presented for some years, which would have been to the liking of Artaud and Brecht.

A recent sensation was the premiere of the play “Schreber. Eine Nervenromanze (”Schreiber - A Nerve Romance“) – book and stage design by the architect, musician and brilliant author Joachim J. Vötter – the second part of the trilogy “Die Walzermembrane“ (“The Walz Membrane”) directed by Kramar. The fascinating text describes the life of Court President Daniel Paul Schreber (1842-1911). He was the son of the paediatrician and pedagogue Daniel Gottlieb Moritz Schreber, who became famous for inventing the allotment garden (“Schrebergarten“ in German) and as a pioneer of “German remedial gymnastics“. Obsessed with separating “noble“ from “ignoble germs“ in children, he developed a tying and chaining apparatus to force their bodies into the right posture. He tested this method with his sons. Daniel Paul Schreber, Court and Senate President of the Supreme Court of Dresden, suffered from a nervous disease and dropped to the bottom of the social ladder. His book “Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken“ (“Memoirs of my Nervous Illness”) appears to be strangely clear and – from today’s perspective – revolutionary. He used it in court for regaining his reputation but faced many difficulties. In the unsparingly honest text he described his mental state and also uncovered the fascistic breeding ground, which was to erupt violently some decades later. Schreber is played by Andreas Patton. The trilogy will be concluded

with the play “Der Weltintendant“ (“The World Manager”), also directed by Kramar.

Recently the audience in 3-room anatomy theatre was carried away by mezzo-soprano/ alto singer Annette Schön Müller in the mono-opera “Das Medium“ (“The Medium”) by British composer Peter M. Davies (production Leo Krischke). The (beautiful) singer, the medium, is torn between severe traumas, religious and sexual mania.

The programme of 3-room anatomy theatre up to March 2009 includes Kafka’s “The Trial“, a production by WORT_ensemble_theater, “Toxoplasma“, a coproduction of different companies, Jean Cocteau’s “The Human Voice” with Kathrin Grumeth and live music by GINGA, and the certainly polarising basement prison soap opera “Pension Fritzl“ (director: Kramar, idea: Hermann Fritzl). Oscar Wilde’s “Lady Windermere’s Fan“ with Lucy Mc Evil will be revived, and also “The Tigers of Bengal 2“ and “Hawaii in Nothingness“ as well as the box-office hit “Schreber“ – all plays are directed by Hubsi Kramar. If you want to add an undreamt of dimension to your stay in Vienna visit the 3-room anatomy theatre:

www.3raum.or.at. Tel.: 0043/6503233377 ■

Akademietheater: premiere of René Pollesch’s “Fantasma“

Elfriede Jelinek considers him one of the best dramatists of the younger generation: 46-year-old René Pollesch born in the village Friedberg (Germany). His father was a mechanic, his mother a housewife. After studying applied theatre research, he became also as an actor. He attracted the attention of the audience for the first time at the Theater am Turm (TAT) in Frankfurt and made his breakthrough in 1999 with plays commissioned by renowned theatres. Pollesch writes his texts himself. Similarly to Bertolt Brecht’s productions the performances are further developed in practice. So far 20 works by him have been premiered.

His latest work was presented under the title “Fantasma“ at the more up-market Akademietheater in Vienna, although the bourgeois theatre of representation and illusion is totally alien to Pollesch. Superb actors such as Sophie Rois, Stephan Wieland or Martin Wuttke turned into speaking machines trying to get faster and faster, but – retarding and recapitulating – they cannot move from the spot. The theme is the finite nature of love and history, of capital and ideologies. Pollesch and his company know the culture

diagnoses by Zeitgeist philosophers like Boris Groys or Slavoj Žižek. The title “Fantasma comes from the work “Infancy and History“ by Giorgio Agamben, in which the Italian philosopher asks whether fantasy can be a place of knowledge. Based on the performance no final judgement can be made as to whether the actors really understood the philosophical texts. The verbal haze and battle for social justice ended after 90 minutes and was enthusiastically applauded by the first-nighters. www.burgtheater.at ■

Franz Koglmann: Ernst-Krenek Prize and “Lo-lee-ta – Music on Nabokov”

On 12 December 2008 a gala night was staged at RadioKulturhaus in Vienna, which had been jointly organised by Wiener Musik Galerie and RadioKulturhaus of the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF) and Ö1 Club. Franz Koglmann was awarded the Ernst Krenek Prize of the City of Vienna for his “Nocturnal Walks“. Koglmann’s “dawning thoughts based on themes by Joseph Haydn with the original voice of E. M. Cioran“, an eight-movement piece for chamber orchestra and trumpet/flugelhorn as well as a taped recording, had been premiered in Sibiu (previously known in German as Hermannstadt) in Romania on 18 May 2007 after a preview at Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna. It was a truly original contribution of an Austrian composer to the European Capital of Culture 2007. One day later the “exxj...ensemble xx. Jahrhundert” led by Peter Burwik and with Franz Koglmann as a soloist performed the work in a seemingly enchanted castle fallen into oblivion in Freck/Avrig, near Sibiu. The castle had belonged to the Governor of Transylvania appointed by Empress Maria Theresa, the Free-Mason Samuel von Brukenthal (1721-1803). Vienna’s Executive Councillor for Culture Andreas Mailath-Pokorny had paid a surprise visit to that concert. At the award ceremony he reminded of this unforgettable night and – by reference to Baron von Brukenthal – he praised above all Franz Koglmann’s enlightening attitude expressed in his art. Before the speech the so far most stringent and powerful version of the “Nocturnal Walks“ had been performed. The composer himself was fabulous as a soloist.

The presentation speech was given by the brilliant head of the culture section of the Vienna city magazine “Falter“, Klaus Nüchtern, who is also an idealistic music producer, under whose label

handesemmel records (www.crackedanegg.com/handsemmel/) founded in 2005 the CD “the bridal suite“ had appeared, in which Koglmann (flugelhorn) and Oskar Aichinger (piano) had devoted themselves to compositions by Burt Bacharach.

Already some decades ago, British composer Peter Maxwell Davies asked in response to the question of a reporter whether he was a representative of the avant-garde: „Avant of what?“ Precisely this historical and artistic situation was pinpointed by Nüchtern in his speech about Koglmann, who “stood more for complexity and less for radicalism“ and “more for Lennie Tristano and less for Cecil Taylor“.

The absolute highlight of the gala was the premiere of Koglmann’s composition “Lo-lee-ta – Music on Nabokov“ with the Monoblue Quartet, with Tony Coe (clarinet, alto/tenor saxophone), Franz Koglmann (trumpet, flugelhorn), Ed Renshaw (guitar) and Peter Herbert (bass).

Several noteworthy film adaptations of the novel “Lolita“ by Vladimir Nabokov had been produced, the latest in 1997 by Adrian Lyne, with Jeremy Irons as professor Humbert Humbert, with Melanie Griffith as Charlotte Haze and Dominique Swain as her daughter Dolores, “Lolita“. Unfortunately this fine film adaptation failed to impress the critics – in contrast to Stanley Kubrick’s legendary film of 1962, for which Vladimir Nabokov himself had written the script, and in which the actors James Mason, Shelley Winters and “Lolita“ Sue Lyon became famous. The music for the film (used by Kubrick only very discretely) was composed by Nelson Riddle, the catchy Lolita theme orchestrated by Gil Grau was by Bob Harris. Franz Koglmann used it in the introduction to his “Lo-lee-ta“ composition, interpreted in a more indirect, broken way. Other titles of the composition such as “Ada and Van“ obviously refer to other classics by Vladimir Nabokov such as “Ada or Ardor“. For connoisseurs of Koglmann’s work it is hardly surprising that the composer tried to approach the texture of the like-minded Russian-American author (1899-1977), who said in his epilogue to “Lolita“: “For me a work of art only exists to the extent that it gives me what I would flatly like to call esthetical pleasure – a feeling to be in touch somehow, somewhere with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, passion) is the norm“.

“Lo-lee-ta“ will appear on CD in spring 2009. “Koglmann-Haydn Nocturnal Walks: col legno WWE 1CD 20273. www.col-legno.com ■

New Olympic Centre in Salzburg

The University and Regional Sports Centre (ULSZ) Rif officially became an "Olympic Centre". The contract with the Austrian Olympic Committee (ÖOC) was signed in Hallein-Rif (Salzburg) on 10 December 2008. The new Olympic Centre will start operations in early March 2009. Before that, the Land Salzburg and the University of Salzburg have to adopt the necessary formal decisions for the foundation of and the accession to the necessary supporting organisation. It will be named "Academy for Mass and Competitive Sports". The supporting organisation of the Olympic Centre Rif will be financed from subsidies of the federal government (ÖOC) and the Land, money from sponsors as well as contributions by the athletes themselves.

The signing of the contract was "undoubtedly another milestone in Salzburg's history of sport", said Salzburg's sports official Deputy Governor David Brenner at the signing ceremony. "In concrete terms, the Olympic Centre offers a number of advantages to Rif as a location. Additional resources become available for elite sport, the higher status of an Olympic Centre triggers image gains for Salzburg's sports competence centre number one". Supra-regional sports centres such as that in Rif, combining comprehensive infrastructure with sports-medical/scientific examination, coaching and placement facilities, offered ideal conditions for quality improvements of top athletes.

The ÖOC can award individual top quality sports centres the title "Olympic Centre" for one Olympic period, i.e. for four years. The ULSZ Rif receives this quality seal for the XXX. Olympic period (2009 to 2012). At present there are three Olympic Centres in Austria: in Südstadt (Lower Austria), Linz (Upper Austria) and Dornbirn (Vorarlberg).

As ÖOC President Leo Wallner explained, the ÖOC planned to establish "another Olympic Centre in the west of Austria." "Upon awarding this title, the ÖOC enters into a cooperation agreement with the respective Land and the supporting organisation of the Olympic Centre, which guarantees top quality coaching and support to the athletes in the respective disciplines and that all standards regarding sports equipment and testing are met. The ULSZ Rif is one of Austria's leading sports centres with excellent contacts to sports associations, federations, the sports organisation of the Land and to the

university. Thanks to its links to a competitive sports centre of the army and the fact that numerous Austrian top athletes train there, it is very easy for the ULSZ to meet the requirements of the best centre for coaching and training elite athletes", said Wallner. ■

"Life Award" gala in Innsbruck: a tribute to the achievements of people with disabilities

On 8 December 2008 people with disabilities received the "Life Award" in Innsbruck (Tyrol) at an important gala. This is already the fourth time this award has been granted. The awards in different categories were presented at the Regional Theatre of Tyrol. Women's rights activist Lydia la Rivière-Zijdel from the Netherlands received the award for lifetime achievements. As a wheelchair user, she gives for example self-defence courses to girls and women with disabilities.

Oliver Antosch became the winner in the category "economy and society", whom an accident with the motorbike at the age of 18 years left paralysed. Today he occupies a leading IT position with adidas and represents the concerns of staff members with bad health or handicaps as a shop steward.

The deaf painter Josef Hofer became the number one in the category "art and culture". He grew up together with his disabled brother on a farm in Mühlviertel (Upper Austria). His artistic achievements were internationally acknowledged when his works were included in the "Collection de l'Art Brut" in Lausanne (Switzerland).

It seem imperative that tribute is paid to race wheelchair driver Thomas Geierspichler from Salzburg. He won a gold medal at the Paralympics in Beijing 2008.

The "Special Life Award" was conferred on tibetologist Sabriye Tenberken for developing a Braille alphabet for the blind in Tibet and founding a preschool for Tibetan blind children.

The "Special Sport Award" – granted for the first time – went to the Austrian "Race-Across-America" team. The wheelchair drivers covered the distance of 4,912 km from the West Coast to the East Coast in ten days.

The gala was moderated by Mirjam Weichselbraun, the prizes were presented by actress Geraldine Chaplin. ■