

# News from Austria

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## Chancellor Gusenbauer pleads for tax and health reform in 2009

In the TV programme “Pressestunde” of the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF) on 24 February 2008 Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer pled for advancing the tax reform from the planned date 2010 to January 2009. He explained this demand by the changed framework: forecasts of a sluggish growth due to a bleaker international economic situation and real wage losses despite sizeable wage increases. The consequence of an excessive inflation rate in Austria and a tax law hostile to individual performance, with an enormous tax progression affecting in particular average incomes, was that “in the end the wallets remained empty”, said Gusenbauer.

The health reform (including a consolidation of the health insurance institutions) had to enter into force together with a socially fair tax reform already at the beginning of 2009. He emphasised that in both cases “there can be no delay”. “A tax reform plus a health package – this would be the proof of the government’s ability to act and to tackle the main challenges of our country”, explained the head of government in “Pressestunde”. A tax reform committee will be set up. Its tasks will be to evaluate the reform proposals of the governing parties quickly and to submit a balanced reform proposal to the federal government in time. The necessary legal amendments are to be examined in Parliament together with the budget 2009 and are to take effect on 1 January 2009.

Gusenbauer does not want to accept a zero deficit as a prerequisite for a tax reform reducing the average tax burden on the individual citizen by 500 euros and the total tax burden by 3 billion euros. “It is a must to ensure that people will have more money in their pockets. In any case, the digit will be preceded by zero, whether it will be 0.5, 0.3 or 0.4 is of minor importance”, said the Chancellor.

After the Council of Ministers on 27 February 2008 Gusenbauer urged the coalition partner, the Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP), to agree to an advanced tax reform. He also reiterated his demand for a one-time payment of 100 euros to lower income earners as an immediate measure in the context of the planned comprehensive anti-inflation package. ■

## Parliament decides to set up committee investigating case involving Interior Ministry

On 27 February 2008 the Social Democratic (SPÖ) group in Parliament voted unanimously in favour of setting up an investigating committee on the allegations against the Ministry of the Interior, informed Josef Cap, leader of the SPÖ group, in a press conference. The green light was also given by the Greens, the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ) and the Freedom Party (FPÖ). The respective request will be submitted in a special parliamentary session on 3 March 2008. The investigating committee – headed by a member of the opposition – will be given a comprehensive mandate of examination, which will also cover the alleged abuse of office, the disclosure of confidential information on money flows and the manipulation of court files in the BAWAG case, stated Cap. ■

## 1,000 euros for NS victims

On 27 February 2008 the federal government adopted a decision to make symbolic one-time payments of 1,000 euros to the victims of the NS regime and resistance fighters. As the group of recipients was increased from 3000 to 3,300; the initiative will cost about 3.3 million euros. 1,000 euros will be granted to persons eligible under the Act on Victims’ Compensation, their widows/widowers as well as persons in need granted resources from the General Settlement Fund for Victims of National Socialism. ■

## Constitutional Committee agrees on EU Reform Treaty

The EU Reform Treaty was debated by the Constitutional Committee in Parliament on 27 February 2008. The governing coalition and the Greens agreed to ratify the new Reform Treaty (in April). According to the advocates of the “Treaty of Lisbon” replacing the failed EU Constitution, it was not ideal but was an improvement over the preceding Treaty of Nice, e.g. in the area of climate change and globalisation. The Chancellor stressed that the Austrian neutrality in its current dimension was not affected. The need to boost EU acceptance in the population was generally recognised. ■

Federal Chancellor Gusenbauer: “To reduce taxes on small and average incomes and to revamp our health system means to realise two essential reform projects with concrete benefits for the population. I think that with that the government has proven its ability of accomplishing something for Austria.”

Federal Chancellor Gusenbauer: “The Austrian neutrality in its current dimension is not affected by the EU Reform Treaty.”

## Europe Forum in Lech: high-calibre EU meeting

European policies were in the limelight in Lech am Arlberg from 29 February to 2 March 2008. Among the guests accepting the invitation of Federal Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer and Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik for discussions and skiing were Slovenian Prime Minister and incumbent EU Council President Janez Janša, Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski, EU Commission President José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Parliament Hans-Gert Pöttering as well as Austrian EU Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner and Governor of Vorarlberg Herbert Sausgruber.

The current conflict between Serbia and Kosovo, which had declared its independence on 17 February 2008, was high on the agenda. Other topics were stabilisation measures in the region (accelerated EU accession of Croatia) as well as energy issues in connection with energy security and climate protection. ■

## Chancellor Gusenbauer: election of Dmitry Medvedev "little surprising"

Federal Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer described the victory of Dmitry Medvedev at the Russian parliamentary elections as "little surprising". He hoped that the Russian Federation and the EU would be able to intensify "their natural relationship as strategic partners", Gusenbauer told the Austrian Press Agency (APA) on 2 March 2008. ■

## Ireland's PM Bertie Ahern meets with Chancellor Gusenbauer

On 27 February 2008 Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern arrived for a one-day visit in Vienna, where he met with Federal Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer and Federal President Heinz Fischer. In addition, Ahern participated in a meeting of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

"It was a pleasant visit", informed Gusenbauer after his get-together with Ahern. Many things in common were identified. The two countries were not very big but "extremely successful", notably in the economic area. Moreover, both countries were neutral, "not only because of tradition but

also by conviction", and therefore also had to assume responsibility, stressed Gusenbauer. Ireland and Austria were both participating in the Chad mission "to support hundreds of thousands of refugees in desperate need of humanitarian help", stated the Federal Chancellor.

The same goals were pursued in the Western Balkans by supporting the large-scale civilian mission, e.g. with peace-keeping troops in Kosovo to guarantee "independence under surveillance", underlined Gusenbauer. Prime Minister Ahern explained that the forthcoming recognition of Kosovo (by Ireland) was not "an expression of hostility towards Serbia".

As the main beneficiaries of European integration, the two countries would support and promote all further integration steps, assured the Federal Chancellor. ■

## Austria officially recognises the independence of Kosovo

Following a resolution of the federal government (20 February 2008), on 27 February 2008 Federal President Heinz Fischer gave the green light for the recognition of Kosovo by Austria and officially authorised Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik to take all the necessary steps. The Foreign Minister signed the recognition documents on 28 February 2008 and forwarded them to the Austrian representation in Pristina. Recognition will take effect upon submission of the documents to the Kosovar authorities in Pristina in some days.

On 28 February 2008 the new "International Steering Group" (ISG) on Kosovo was formed in Vienna. Its members are, among others, Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Sweden, Turkey, France, Great Britain and the USA. ■

## Federal President Fischer visits Africa

Federal President Heinz Fischer paid visits to the African states Ethiopia and Mali from 20 to 23 February 2008. He was accompanied inter alia by his wife Margit as well as parliamentary and trade delegations. Besides bilateral contacts, the aim of the visits was to intensify cooperation between the African Union (AU) and the European Union. ■

Federal Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer: "Ireland and Austria are neutral, not only because of tradition but also by conviction."

Federal Chancellor Gusenbauer: "The recognition of Kosovo is an important step towards stabilising the Balkans, and this includes Serbia, which has to be given the perspective of membership in the European Union."

## Public Employment Service: record plus in job placement services

The Public Employment Service (Arbeitsmarktservice/AMS) registered a record plus in new job openings in 2007. This was explained by the favourable economic situation and the strong labour demand. In 2007 a total of 369,569 vacancies were notified to the AMS, this corresponds to a plus of 10.1% or 33,961 new jobs compared to the previous year, informed AMS head Johannes Kopf on 22 February 2008. The absolutely largest increase in the number of jobs was registered by the AMS in company-related services. In the previous year a total of 110,019 vacancies was reported in this sector (plus 14.7%). With 83,445 job openings registered by the AMS, the tourist sector also recorded a sharp increase in labour demand (plus 11.2%). Trade reported about 47,667 vacancies, i.e. plus 9.9% from the level of 2006.

According to AMS boss Kopf, the increase was not only a consequence of the economic boom but was also due to the efforts of the AMS to increase the number of companies using placement services. About 70,000 companies recruited their staff through the AMS, while it had been only 50,000 in 2006. Thus the Public Employment Service managed to boost the so-called "involvement rate". While in 2006 29% of all vacancies were filled through the AMS, the share rose to 32% in 2007.

To continue improving the quality of counselling, the AMS will increase its personnel by 150 persons, as demanded by the social partners. The new employees will be active in customer counselling. ■

## Current account balance 2007: surplus climbed to 7.3 billion euros

In 2007 Austria exported again significantly more goods than it imported. According to a preliminary estimate of the Austrian National Bank (OeNB) of 19 February 2007, the current account surplus climbed to 7.3 billion euros in 2007 from 6.7 billion euros in the prior year.

The domestic export sector scored a success above all with services. The result of 2007 exceeded the prior-year level by almost 2 billion euros. The favourable trend of the current account balance led to a capital surplus of

Austria vis-à-vis the other countries. Significant capital outflows of about 30 billion euros net were registered particularly in the international credit and deposit business, stated the OeNB. ■

## Budget deficit 2007 about 0.7%

According to the preliminary budget review for 2007, the public sector deficit will amount to 2.87 billion euros or 0.7% of the gross domestic product (GDP). This result is better than expected as originally a deficit of 0.9% (3.86 billion euros) had been budgeted for. The average deficit in the euro-zone was about 0.8%. On 26 February 2008 Minister of Finance Wilhelm Molterer explained this by the favourable economic growth and the consequential increase in tax revenue (64.7 billion euros). ■

## Continuing upward trend in winter season 2007/08

A sizeable increase in hotel nights in Austria's tourist enterprises has been registered during the winter season 2007/08. The number of hotel nights rose by 1.74 million or 7% year-on-year to a total of 26.62 million between November and January. In January alone hotel nights registered a plus of 4.9% to 13.66 million. Tourists from Russia are increasingly important. Their number surged by 23.7% (420,800 hotel nights from November to January). These data were provided by the Austrian Statistical Office (Statistik Austria) on 26 February 2008.

Foreigners account for more than three quarters of the 26.62 million hotel nights (76.7%), while Austrians represent 23.3%. Vienna recorded the steepest increase in hotel nights (plus 12.2%). With more than 10 million hotel nights, Tyrol has achieved one of its best seasonal results in absolute figures in many years. ■

## OMV boasts record profit

In 2007 the listed Austrian petrol and gas group OMV – the market leader in Central and Eastern Europe – registered for the fifth time in a row a record net profit (of 8% to about 1.7 billion euros). The earnings before interest and taxes (EBIT) climbed by 6% to approx. 2.2 billion euros. The dividend 2007 will be stepped up to 1.12 euros per share, informed the OMV. ■

With a total of 369,569 new jobs, 10.1% more vacancies were notified to the Public Employment Service in 2007 than in the previous year.

Between November and January the number of hotel nights increased by 1.74 million or 7% (to a total of 26.62 million overnight stays) compared to the same period of the previous year.

In 2007 the OMV registered for the fifth time in a row a record net profit: 1.649 billion euros (+ 8%).

Foreign Language Film Oscar goes to "The Counterfeiters" by director Stefan Ružowitzky

After the Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to Elfriede Jelinek in 2004, this is undoubtedly the most important tribute paid to an Austrian artist. On Sunday evening (4.44 a.m. CET), 24 February 2008, actress Penelope Cruz entered the stage of the Kodak Theatre in Los Angeles, opened an envelop and announced that the Prize for the best non-English language film went to Austria. The Oscar-winning film is "Die Fälscher" ("The Counterfeiters") by Stefan Ružowitzky. In his thank-you statement the film director highlighted the fact that colleagues from Austria like Billy Wilder, Fred Zinnemann or Otto Preminger had preceded him; however, they had been persecuted and displaced by the Nazis. Therefore it made sense that now the Oscar-winning film "The Counterfeiters" addressed the period and crimes of the NS regime. Besides, the film "38" by Wolfgang Glück, which had been highly acclaimed by Wilder and was set in the same period, had already been nominated for the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar in 1986.

The story was based on the memories of Adolf Burger (August Diehl in the film), a prisoner in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Together with about 140 inmates, he had to print 134 million British pound notes, stamps as well as US dollars between 1942 and 1945. In the camp Burger met the counterfeiter Salomon Smolianoff, who is "Sally" Sorowitsch in the film. This role is played by Karl Markovics (44). The actor from Vienna has often enacted impressively torn personalities like the mail bomber "Franz Fuchs" or inspector "Stockinger". While Smolianoff, who remained a forger also after World War II and was searched by Interpol, died in Argentina in the 1960s, the almost 90-year-old Burger lives in Prague today and attended the Oscar ceremony.

With phoney currency the NS leadership wanted to weaken the economy of the allied forces. When NS experts discovered that the paper used for the British pound notes was handmade from used and washed linen, they succeeded in printing money that seemed strikingly real. The team of "Operation Andreas" and after 1942 of "Operation Bernhard" (named after SS commander Bernhard Krüger) produced about

650,000 banknotes per month as from summer 1943. This corresponded to 134 million pounds by April 1945. In 1945 almost every second pound note circulating in Great Britain was said to be a forged note.

At the end of the war leading Nazis started to use the forged money for establishing their post-war existence. Based on US information, about 750 companies were founded or bought with this "capital" in Central America, Argentina but also in Europe after 1945.

Stefan Ružowitzky was born in Vienna in 1961. He spent his youth in Upper Austria and Düsseldorf (Germany). He lives with his wife and two children in Klosterneuburg near Vienna. In 1998 he achieved a breakthrough with the feature film "Die Siebtelbauern" ("The Inheritors"). The rural drama won many awards, e.g. the Max Ophüls Prize, the Tiger Award (Best Film Rotterdam), the Krzysztof Kieslowski Prize for the Best European Film in Denver and the Prize for the Best Film in Potsdam and Geneva. The horror film "Anatomie" ("Anatomy") also became a success. The film director also loves children's films, his "Hexe Lilli" ("Lilli the Witch") is in the post-production phase.

Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer and Minister of Culture Claudia Schmied congratulated already in the early morning of 25 February 2008. They promised to create better conditions for Austrian film-making. President Heinz Fischer mentioned in his congratulation the "very positive development" of Austrian film-making. He stressed the "outstanding historical topicality" of the jury's decision to give the award to a film representing "an important document about one aspect of the NS period" shortly before the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Austria's annexation to Hitler Germany.

Among those congratulating was the committee LAMBDA, Austria's civil rights organisation for homosexual, bisexual and transsexual women and men. The film director had made a decisive contribution to the campaign for abolishing Section 209 of the Austrian Penal Code, a special anti-homosexual criminal law provision, which was finally repealed in 2002. In 1995 he had produced free of charge the film "Schwule Jugendliche – Kein Recht zu lieben?" ("Gay youth – no right to love?"), which became a "valuable key element in the PR work and campaign of the platform against Section 209". ■

[www.diefaelscher.at](http://www.diefaelscher.at)

Adolf Burger wrote an exciting book about his experience: Des Teufels Werkstatt. Die größte Fälscheraktion der Geschichte. Sandmann-Verlag ISBN: 978-3-938045-23-7 (The Devil's Workshop)

## EURO 2008: concert in Schönbrunn with Netrebko, Domingo, Villazon

Two days before the final tournament of EURO 2008 (European Football Championship) on 27 June 2008 Bertrand de Billy will conduct the Radio Symphonic Orchestra Vienna (RSO). Schönbrunn Palace will be the perfect setting for the concert starring singers Anna Netrebko, Plácido Domingo and Rolando Villazon. The concert in the Court of Honour will be held regardless of weather conditions. ■

[www.carinthi-schersommer.at](http://www.carinthi-schersommer.at)

## VIENNAFAIR – the International Contemporary Art Fair 2008

VIENNAFAIR – the International Contemporary Art Fair with a focus on Central and Eastern Europe – is held already for the 4<sup>th</sup> time from 24 to 27 April 2008 at the fair trade centre in Vienna. In the past few years, VIENNAFAIR has established itself as a hub between Eastern and Western Europe in the array of international art fairs. In 2007 107 galleries from 22 countries participated in the art fair, which was visited by about 14,700 art lovers. This year a similar number of galleries will exhibit, while more visitors are expected as many outstanding artists from (South) Eastern Europe will be represented who are not yet well known but could be an interesting investment in the long run. ■

[www.viennafair.at](http://www.viennafair.at)

## BA-CA Kunstforum: “Monet-Kandinsky-Rothko” – abstract painting

BA-CA Kunstforum turns the spotlight on a key aspect of modern painting – abstraction – in an exhibition running up to 29 June 2008. The period covered in the show spans from pioneers of modernism like Claude Monet, Wassily Kandinsky or Kasimir Malevich and protagonists of Abstract Expressionism, such as Mark Rothko or Willem de Kooning, to current positions in art, e.g. by Gerhard Richter, Brice Marden and Sean Scully. Development histories, stylistic and formal-esthetical themes lend coherence and structure to the exhibition concept. Based on this approach, the affinities, traditions, analogies and differences between different works of art of different generations are illustrated, which highlight the fundamental importance and topicality of abstraction for painting. ■

Monet-Kandinsky-Rothko: [www.ba-ca-kunstforum.at](http://www.ba-ca-kunstforum.at)

## Carinthian Summer Festival 2008

45 events at nine different venues are offered by the Carinthian Summer Festival taking place from 11 July to 31 August 2008. A special highlight are eight world premiers and nine Austrian premiers.

With the world premier of the new adaptation of Sir John Tavener’s “Mary of Egypt“ in the collegiate church of Ossiach (room design: Herbert Kapplmüller) and the revival of Thomas Daniel Schlee’s “Ich, Hiob“, two church operas are performed this year.

A special programme section with seven additional works is devoted to the 64-year-old Englishman Tavener, which are all world premiers or Austrian premiers. Before the premier on 11 July 2008, mathematician and “Scholar of the Year” 2004 Rudolf Taschner will deliver the opening speech.

The programme also includes two children’s operas: Bruno Bjelinski’s fairytale opera “Maya the Bee“ (production and stage design: Stephan Bruckmeier) performed by students of Carinthia’s regional music school “Kärntner Landesmusikschulwerk“ at the Congress Center Villach, and “Lilli. A Flower Musical“ by Stephan Bruckmeier and Stephan Kühne.

A new series labelled “cs\_alternativ“ will be launched. Literature is represented with Klaus Siblewski’s “Telephongespräche mit Ernst Jandl“ (“Talks on the phone with Ernst Jandl”) and the performance “Chorphantasie und so“ (“Choir Fantasy and the like”) by Gert Jonke and Markus Hering.

The concert programme lists for example the Bamberger Symphonic Orchestra, Camerata Salzburg, the Arnold Schoenberg Choir, counter-tenor Terry Wey, pianists Andras Schiff and Rudolf Buchbinder as well as mezzo soprano Angelika Kirchschrager. Three serenade concerts will be staged in the courtyard of the convent of Ossiach hopefully in good weather.

The final concert on 30 August 2008 takes Sächsische Staatskapelle Dresden led by Fabio Luisi to Villach, where the festival will be rounded off under motto “PeopleArt – ArtPeople“ with cross-over projects and performances by Carinthian artists, from Udo Jürgens to Gerhard Lampersberg, at different venues on 31 August 2008. ■

## Federal Chancellery plans to launch Internet emergency system

The Austrian registration centre for Internet addresses nic.at plans to establish a competence centre for IT security in cooperation with the Federal Chancellery. The model of a computer emergency response team (CERT) has already proven successful in many European countries, explained nic.at manager Robert Schischka. CERT would act as a “public sector service provider” and in fulfilling its role “as an information hub” it would ensure “the necessary international networking“. The Federal Chancellery would contribute towards the costs and provide competent staff and points of contacts. The economic sector and hospitals were also showing great interest in the project. At present the focus was on establishing networks with experts to be able to make a contribution to the protection of the IT and Telecom infrastructure. “To develop the CERT project for Austria will be a major step towards the security of consumers and the business community”, said Secretary of State for Administration Heidrun Silhavy at the opening of the Internet congress “Domain pulse“ in Vienna. Federal Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer addressed social issues: “We must also overcome the digital gap to make the world fairer“. Austria registered already a high domain density. The .at-zone had existed “for 20 years. While ten years ago there had been only about 30,000 web addresses, now there were already more than 700,000. The 1-million threshold is expected to be surpassed still in this decade“, predicted the head of government. Hence, Austria was among the international leaders. As a result, governance and security issues were of growing importance. ■

## Year of Intercultural Dialogue opened at Vienna Stadthalle

With the concert “Be a Mensch“ by Willi Resetarits and 40 international artists, the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008 (EYID 2008) was opened at Stadthalle in Vienna. Minister of Culture Claudia Schmied, whose ministry is responsible for implementing this EU initiative in Austria, presented the first “EYID ambassadors, among them Timna Brauer, Martin Kusej, Atil Kutoglu, Sebastian Martinez

and Dimitre Dinev, who described dialogue as a “school of humanity“. The aim of the EYID 2008 is to enhance the understanding among cultures. Especially young people should learn how to move successfully in an increasingly complex cultural environment. The EYID 2008 is supported by media cooperation partners like the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF) and independent radio stations. A “dialogue tour“ with regional highlights such as school and youth projects will be organised through the capitals of the Länder from 4 April to 6 May 2008. The opening concert will be attended by President Heinz Fischer, Minister Schmied as well as several members of government. ■

## Commemorating Hans Janitschek

Hans Janitschek (aged 73), US correspondent of Kronen Zeitung and former Secretary-General of the Socialist International, dropped dead in front of the UN headquarters in New York on 21 February 2008. He lived and worked in the USA since 1977. Born in 1934, he had worked in the USA for the first time already in the 1950s, for the news agencies United Press and Reuters. Later he worked in Vienna with Kurier and Express. In 1963 he changed to the foreign service and returned to Austria in 1966 as an advisor of later Chancellor Bruno Kreisky.

Chancellor Gusenbauer, deeply affected by the death of his “dear friend”, stated: “Besides his activity as a journalist, Hans Janitschek served in the United Nations and was committed to the welfare of his fellow human beings. For all of us he was one of the most important contacts in New York, who knew every quarter of the city and managed to open the doors to US politics for all Austrians regardless of their party affiliation. For many years Janitschek was one of the most important advisors of Bruno Kreisky. In this capacity he decisively shaped Austrian foreign policy“.

Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik praised the manifold commitment of the deceased “in the interest of Austrians living abroad – not only in the USA but all over the world“. Especially through his work as a journalist, he was able to familiarise a wider public with the right to vote of foreigners. “In these difficult days I express my deep sympathy in particular to his wife and his children“. ■

[www.bundeskanzleramt.at](http://www.bundeskanzleramt.at)

[www.interkultureller-dialog-2008.at](http://www.interkultureller-dialog-2008.at)

[www.dialogue2008.eu](http://www.dialogue2008.eu)

[www.bmukk.gv.at/eruopa/ejid/botschafterinnen.xml](http://www.bmukk.gv.at/eruopa/ejid/botschafterinnen.xml)

## EURO: "ALL OF Austria on the ball"

On 28 February 2008 the 100-day countdown to the European Football Championship started. To ensure that the whole country will be ready for the EURO in June, President Heinz Fischer, Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer, Secretary of State for Sport Reinhold Lopatka, Vienna's Mayor and President of the Austrian Federation of Cities Michael Häupl, President of the Federation of Municipalities Mayor Helmut Mödlhammer, ÖFB President Friedrich Stickler and other key figures of the forthcoming European Football Championship kicked off the campaign "2008 – ALL OF Austria on the ball". Its main focus is on supplying the whole nation with signposts and flags. In addition, the "fan community 2008" will be selected by 22 June 2008. The free basic package contains five topographical signposts with the inscription "We are on the ball", ten flags, fifty T-shirts and forty bracelets of the association Sporthilfe. ■

## Austrian eagles at Ski Flying World Championships showered with gold

The "eagles" of ÖSV (Austrian Skiing Association) gave a masterly display at the Ski Flying World Championships in Oberstdorf (Germany). The ÖSV ski jumpers crowned their excellent season with the double victory of Gregor Schlierenzauer and Martin Koch in the individual event and with Thomas Morgenstern and Andreas Kofler winning for the first time gold for Austria in the team competition. Gregor Schlierenzauer was most impressive. The only 18-year-old athlete scored a runaway victory in his Ski Flying World Championship debut and became the youngest ski flying world champion in history. With three world championship medals, the Austrian team led by chief coach Alexander Pointner was unrivalled. ■

## Skyrocketing federal sports funding

A favourable trend in sports funding, growing public awareness about the social importance of sport and need for action in health and mass sports – these were the top items on the agenda of the recent meeting of the Sports Committee, unanimously applauding the 2005/06 Sport Report. Today the total funding available to the

Austrian sport is higher than ever. Thanks to the high turnover of Österreichische Lotterien (Austrian Lotteries), the budget of the special sports promotion scheme increased from 33.4 million in 2000 to double this amount in 2008 (61.2 million euros in 2007). In the same period, the funds allocated from the budget of the general sports promotion scheme to the sports associations rose from 7.85 to 18.2 million euros. For disabled sports programmes a remarkable 60% increase to 1 million euros was achieved. The sound financial basis does not only allow safe planning by the sports associations and long-term investments in sports and exercise programmes but is also a foundation for the future success of sport. ■

## Austria pays homage to "Mr. Sport", Sigmund "Sigi" Bergmann

Sigmund „Sigi“ Bergmann has been awarded the Golden Badge of Honour for Meritorious Service to the Republic of Austria. He is one of the most important personalities in publicising sports. With his exciting and emotional TV programme "Sport am Montag" ("Sports on Monday"), he educated and shaped several generations of Austrians.

The presentation speech was given by Professor Gunnar Prokop, without whom the miracle in women's handball of the Lower Austrian team of Hypo-Südstadt would not have been possible. He reminded of the fact that Monday was the "day of fate" in Sigi Bergmann's life. For on 3 February 1975 Teddy Podgorsky entrusted him with the first "Sport am Montag" programme, which he produced in his very special way 819 times in the period up to 23 March 1992. With his journalistic work, the historian (Ph.D.) and trained opera singer born in 1938 made a vital contribution to the image of Austrian sport in Austria and abroad. In summer 2008 Sigi Bergmann will celebrate his comeback as a box moderator for the ORF at the Olympic Games in Beijing. ■

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