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Parliamentary elections 2008: unprecedented number of parties

On 28 September 2008 the Austrian population will elect a new National Council (1st chamber of Parliament). About 6.4 million citizens have the right to vote, including for the first time young people having completed the age of 16 on election day. Moreover, this is the first election in which postal vote is admitted, and the legislative period is extended from four to five years.

The National Council has 183 members. Besides the Federal President, it is the only organ of the Federal Republic of Austria legitimised through direct election by the people. Together with the Federal Council (2nd chamber of Parliament), it exercises the legislative power of the Federal Republic. It also fulfils important control tasks (government work, financial management of the federal agencies, transparency in political decision-making).

The top candidates of the two governing parties still in office (running for Federal Chancellor) are the Chairman of the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) and Minister of Infrastructure, Werner Faymann, as well as Wilhem Molterer, Chairman of the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), incumbent Vice-Chancellor and Minister of Finance.

The remaining parties currently represented in Parliament are the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) with top candidate Heinz-Christian Strache, the Greens led by Alexander Van der Bellen and the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ) with Jörg Haider.

Besides these five parties, the Liberal Forum (LIF) headed by Heide Schmidt, the Citizens' Forum (Liste Fritz) with Fritz Dinkhauser, who won 18.3% in the regional elections in Tyrol, the Communist Party of Austria (KPÖ) with top candidate Mirko Messner, the Christians (DCP) with Alfons Adam and the EU-critical party "Save Austria" (Rettö) led by Wilfried Auerbach will participate in the election.

To this the parties have to be added which won enough support only in some Länder. The electoral alliance "The Left" will take part in the election in five Länder, e.g. in Vienna.

According to polls, the LIF stands a good chance of overcoming the 4% hurdle of required votes to enter Parliament. Within two weeks its voter

support rose from 1 to 3%; the "Liste Fritz" is currently backed by 4% of the voters.

The present distribution of seats in the National Council is as follows: SPÖ: 68; ÖVP: 66; Greens: 21; FPÖ: 21; BZÖ: 7. ■

Agreement on 24-hour care

In the discussion about 24-hour care, the governing parties agreed on the countrywide abolishment of the asset threshold applicable to financing long-term care. The respective resolution was passed in a special meeting of the Council of Ministers on 12 August 2008. The formal decision falls within the purview of the Länder (the asset threshold has already been abolished in Lower Austria and Vorarlberg). This is a major step in solving the problem of providing 24-hour domiciliary care to persons in need of care services. Besides deciding to abolish the asset threshold of 7,000 euros in all Länder, an agreement was reached to increase the subsidy for 24-hour care and the long-term care benefit significantly.

According to the government's resolution, up to 550 euros (currently a maximum of 225 euros) will be granted if two self-employed care providers are active (half the amount for one carer). The model for employed care providers is to be funded with a maximum of 1,100 euros (currently 800 euros). In Lower Austria, Vorarlberg and Salzburg higher amounts are granted already now, i.e. 500 and 1,000 euros respectively. Care level 3 or higher is a prerequisite for entitlement to this subsidy. Moreover, a medical certificate confirming the need of intensive care services must be submitted for care levels 3 and 4. ■

46,000 people have benefited from cap on prescription fees so far

More than 46,000 persons have already benefited from the cap on prescription fees. Based on the new rules entering into force on 1 January 2008, nobody has to pay more than 2% of his/her annual net income for medication requiring a medical prescription. The main beneficiaries are pensioners and chronically ill people. Minister for Social Affairs Erwin Buchinger estimates that by year-end about 350,000 health insured people will profit from this new provision. ■

Salzburg: Gusenbauer invites PMs from South Eastern Europe

As Federal Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer informed, energy issues, climate change, international economic trends as well as internal affairs were the key items on the agenda of the "Meeting for Stability in South Eastern Europe in the 21st Century". This year's meeting (the seventh since the inception of the event) was attended by the Prime Ministers of Serbia, Mirko Cvetković, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Nikola Špirić, Macedonia, Nikola Gruevski, Montenegro, Milo Đukanović, Albania, Sali Berisha, and Moldavia, Zinaida Greceanîi. The head of government of Romania, Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu, had to cancel his participation due to the flood disaster in his home country. Croatian Prime Minister Ivo Sanader was also absent.

Gusenbauer stressed that Austria considered itself an important partner of the countries of the Western Balkans, both in political and economic terms. He praised the favourable development of the South Eastern European countries, which had made good economic progress in the past years and whose political systems had been stabilising. The Chancellor also welcomed the pro-European attitude of the new Serbian government and the arrest of the alleged war criminal and former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić. Now it was the turn of the EU to respond favourably. Croatia's EU membership would not only strengthen the political stability of the region but also of the EU, stated Gusenbauer.

In a short press conference the prime ministers emphasised the wish of their countries to join the European Union.

Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Hans Winkler added: "The future of the states of the Western Balkans is in the EU. We have committed ourselves several times to this goal". The Austrian position remained unchanged even after the "no" of the Irish population to the EU Reform Treaty. ■

Federal Chancellor Gusenbauer: Austria takes UN report seriously

More than 20 concerns and recommendations were listed by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in its report on Austria submitted in Geneva on

18 August 2008.

The report stated that the Austrian government had to step up its efforts to ensure the rights of migrants, asylum seekers and Austrian minorities, especially the Roma and Sinti. The Committee also criticised the "often xenophobic" treatment of minorities, asylum seekers, refugees and migrants in the public by the political parties in the election campaign. The discrimination of members of minorities seeking housing and jobs was noted "with concern".

CERD expressed criticism above all about the conflict over bilingual topographical signs in Carinthia. It calls on Austria to speed up the "adequate implementation" of the decision of the Constitutional Court of 2001 concerning bilingual topographical signs in Carinthia. While welcoming the fact that more people with a migration background had been recruited into the public administration, CERD still considered the number of members of minorities active in the public administration too low. As one of 173 state parties to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Austria has to submit regular reports on measures against racism in Austria.

Federal Chancellor Gusenbauer explained that the recommendations of the UN committee had to be taken seriously. "The equal treatment of all people, regardless of their ethnic origin and belonging, is one of the most fundamental principles of the Republic of Austria. The consequence is an active commitment to the elimination of racism and xenophobia". The Chancellor requested the ministers "to examine their sphere of competence based on the recommendations of the UN Committee. In this election campaign "it must be taken for granted that all campaigning parties avoid racist and xenophobic slogans". With regard to the bilingual topographical signs, the Chancellor said: "I consider a quick solution necessary. However, the Austrian People's Party has to give up its obstructive attitude towards the proposal made by me. My proposal for a solution of June 2007 was accepted by all organisations of the Slovenes, the mayors of the communities affected, the Churches as well as the Social Democratic Party and the Greens. This motion has been submitted to Parliament and could be adopted anytime if approved by a constitutional majority". ■

AUA looks for strategic partner: green light for privatisation

The domestic air carrier Austrian Airlines (AUA) facing losses is to be fully privatised. There are no more obstacles to selling the 42.75% block of shares held by the state holding company ÖIAG. But according to the official interpretation, this does not mean a complete sale of AUA. Austria will continue to hold a blocking minority of 25% plus one share. This requirement forms part of the privatisation mandate to prevent important decisions which could have a detrimental effect on Austria as a business location. The ÖIAG could keep a share in AUA to guarantee Austria's 25% stake if there are not enough private prospective buyers.

This compromise was agreed on by the leadership of the Austrian government and the management of the state holding company ÖIAG responsible for AUA. The official go-ahead for privatisation was given by the federal government to the ÖIAG in a special session of the Council of Ministers on 12 August 2008. The sale is to be completed by the end of 2008 at the latest. Hence, the government gives the ÖIAG, which is in charge of selecting a partner for AUA, more time than expected to sell the Federal Republic's share. Previously, a sale by the end of October – one month after the national elections – had been the goal.

According to the responsible decision-makers, the blocking minority could be held by private companies and investors. Both government parties expressed their satisfaction about the compromise. Now the full privatisation of AUA had become possible, and Austria's interests were protected through the remaining 25% stake, Vice-Chancellor and Minister of Finance Wilhelm Molterer was pleased to inform. Werner Faymann – incumbent Minister of Infrastructure and new party chief and candidate for the office of Chancellor of the Social Democratic Party – underlined that Austria's blocking minority safeguarded 65,000 jobs in aviation as well as Vienna's role as a business location and aviation hub.

More information about a possible future partner of AUA is not yet available. The consulting firm "Boston Consulting" proposed German Lufthansa as the best partner for AUA. Lufthansa signalled their general interest in its Star

Alliance partner AUA. In the first six months of 2008, AUA made a loss of almost 50 million euros due to the high fuel prices. At present, AUA employs about 8,000 staff members, the fleet consists of 99 airplanes. ■

OMV records spectacular net profit in the first half of 2008

In the wake of the high crude oil price, the listed domestic OMV group boosted its profit by more than half in the first six months of 2008, significantly exceeding the expectations of the analysts.

The surplus for the period after minority interests climbed by 52% to 1.130 billion euros, as the leading oil and gas group of Central and Eastern Europe informed recently. Sales recorded an increase by 41% to 12.919 billion euros. The number of employees rose by 11% to 41,957.

The favourable results are mainly due to the successful operations of the Division Exploration & Production (E&P). Despite negative trends, its operating result surged by 70% to 752 million euros. For the year 2008 OMV CEO Wolfgang Rutenstorfer expects "a robust result – and if profit goes up, the dividend will go up".

The planned several-billion take-over of the Hungarian energy group MOL has been cancelled by the OMV. The enterprise explained that was due to a veto of the European Commission, which had demanded far-reaching measures (disinvestment), especially in the refinery sector. ■

Export gains in the first quarter

Austria's export sector has again grown in the first quarter 2008. Based on the balance of payments of the Austrian National Bank (OeNB), the exports of both goods and services recorded increases. The surplus of Austria's current account increased to 5.4 billion euros from 4.1 billion euro in the previous quarter. The exports of goods rose by 7% to 30.6 billion euros from the prior-year level, while imports increased by only 4% to 29.8 billion euros. Services exports also registered a plus of 10%; the total export volume amounted to 12.3 billion euros. The income from tourism alone amounted to 6 billion euros in the first quarter. ■

Austria mourns for former Federal Chancellor Fred Sinowatz

Since 11 August 2008 the flags of Parliament, Hofburg (President's seat) and the Federal Chancellery were flying at half-mast. Former Federal Chancellor (1983 to 1986) Fred Sinowatz had died at the age of 79.

He was of Burgenland-Croatian descent, his family lived in Neufeld/Leitha. His father was a mechanic installer in the nearby coal mine, his mother a factory worker. They did their utmost to support their talented son, who excelled in the A level exam at the grammar school in Baden (for at that time there was no public grammar school in Burgenland). He completed his history studies at Vienna University in 1953 with a Ph.D.; "Protestantism and Catholic Counter-Reformation" in one part of the Burgenland was the main subject of his doctoral thesis. This was probably when he first felt the desire to work not only as a historian but to become politically active and to improve the social conditions in Burgenland, which he loved so much and to which he was firmly committed throughout his life. He built a house on a plot of land given to him by his parents as a gift. He lived there with his wife (who died in 1995) and two children, and later on his own. He returned to Neufeld every night even as a minister of education and as a chancellor. Obviously, he drew great strength from his roots. He enjoyed a simple life and felt best amongst ordinary people. Burgenland was always the landscape of his soul. Aged 28, Fred Sinowatz became the Chairman of the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) of Neufeld. During the appointment ceremony, he was introduced to Bruno Kreisky, who delivered a political statement on that evening. Sinowatz soon made a career in SPÖ of Burgenland. In 1961 he became a member of the regional parliament (Landtag), in 1962 he was elected Regional Party Secretary. Thanks to his zealous work and leadership of the election campaign, the party won a majority in the Landtag in 1964 and for the first time since 1945 appointed the Governor of Burgenland. Fred Sinowatz became the President of the Landtag. As Burgenland's Councillor for Culture, he became a member of the regional government in 1966. Cultural policy was his principal field of interest, and this did not change throughout his life. His vision was

that social justice could be achieved only by accessible culture and improving education. Culture was not the prerogative of an elitist minority, knowledge barriers and initial fears had to be overcome. In concrete terms this meant for the Burgenland new schools, the (further) development of adult education, opportunities for artists, new libraries, community centres, promotion of different cultural activities, supporting modern art and experiment besides cultivating tradition. Under Fred Sinowatz, an open tolerant cultural climate characterised Burgenland.

After the SPÖ won the elections in October 1971, Bruno Kreisky appointed the successful and popular regional politician into his Cabinet. Fred Sinowatz was Federal Minister for Education and Art from 4 November 1971 to 24 May 1983. He was not only one of the ministers of education with the longest term of office during the Second Republic but certainly the most successful. During his era, the modernisation of the Austrian society progressed significantly. This was also due to a number of vital educational measures and developments in the school system. Based on the Social Democrat's basic principle that every talented child should have free access to higher education, the initiatives of the new minister of education aimed at greater social and regional equality of opportunities. Higher secondary schools in important towns of the Länder helped to reduce the traditional educational gap between urban and rural areas. Free school transport and free textbooks were introduced, subsidies for (boarding) school costs were granted. The admission exam to grammar school was abolished, countrywide co-education (i.e. joint education of boys and girls) became the standard. A new school type allowed also the pupils of secondary schools to take the A level exam. The School Education Act of 1 September 1974 created a new legal basis for cooperation among teachers, parents and pupils.

After Hannes Androsch resigned from government in January 1981, Fred Sinowatz became Vice-Chancellor, which he himself had not planned. When the SPÖ lost the absolute majority in the parliamentary elections in 1983 and Kreisky stepped down, Sinowatz was appointed Chancellor in May 1983. Bruno Kreisky had proposed the popular minister as

chancellor for his “great human virtues”. On Kreisky’s request, he also became SPÖ Chairman. He formed a coalition with the Freedom Party (FPÖ) led by Norbert Steger, for which Kreisky had paved the way. It had to tackle major problems, e.g. budget consolidation and reduction of the growing public-sector deficit. By adopting a set of measures, this was successfully managed. However, there was a continuing crisis in the nationalised industry chalking up hefty losses. In a conflict with environmentalists over the construction of a power plant on the Danube river near Hainburg, the Chancellor played a mediating role in December 1984. He tried to avert the downfall of the government by reshuffling his Cabinet.

He also faced major problems as a party chief as several SPÖ politicians became notorious for their pursuit of profit. Some party members cancelled their party membership and changed over to the Greens.

The campaign for the president’s office in 1986 was characterised by a highly emotional confrontation between SPÖ candidate Kurt Steyrer and his counterpart from the People’s Party (ÖVP), former long-time UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim. As Waldheim was allegedly a member of the mounted unit of the NS paramilitary force, the Sturm-Abteilung (SA) in WWII., the hard-fought election campaign caused a global stir. In June 1986, one day after Waldheim’s victory, Sinowatz stepped down and recommended previous Minister of Finance Franz Vranitzky as his successor, who also followed him as a party chairman in 1988.

Living a quite secluded life, Fred Sinowatz devoted himself to his beloved historical studies, worked on his memoirs and met with old friends. He had always longed for a quiet, simple life. The great humanist had decisively shaped the fruitful cultural development of his community, the Burgenland and the Second Republic. He always felt at home with the socially weakest groups, and the peaceful co-existence of people was the primary focus of his activity. The achievements of Sinowatz, who strove for social balance and general welfare, set new standards, forming an integral part of the Austrian society and its humanisation.

The corpse of Fred Sinowatz was laid out in state in the Hall of Pillars of Parliament in Vienna on 20 August 2008. Many people came to bid

farewell. On 21 August 2008 he was buried in a tomb of honour in Neufeld/Leitha after a memorial ceremony in the Landtag in Eisenstadt. Among the mourners were leading personalities of Austria, e.g. President Fischer, Chancellor Gusenbauer, Vice-Chancellor and Minister of Finance Molterer, as well as representatives of Burgenland, such as Governor Niessl. Last but not least numerous friends and companions of the deceased attended the funeral ceremony. The Church also paid tribute to the ex-chancellor. The parish priest of Neufeld Wilhelm Ringhofer pointed out that as a Catholic Christian Sinowatz had also maintained close relations with the Protestant Church and the Jewish Religious Community. As the President of the Jewish Museum in Eisenstadt, Sinowatz had always reminded of the fate of the Jewish communities in Burgenland destroyed during the NS period. ■

Waldviertel: Gmünd celebrates 800th anniversary

Gmünd is not only an important municipality and town neighbouring the Czech Republic but also the economic and cultural centre of the upper Waldviertel region. After the Czech Republic joined the EU, Gmünd has come to occupy a more central position in Europe. The name of the town is etymologically derived from “Gemeinde“, the “flowing together” of the rivers Lainsitz and Braunau.

Gmünd – founded by Hadmar II. of Kuenring in the 12th century – was mentioned in historical documents already in 1208 as a town with an independent jurisdiction. After that the parish of Gmünd was created as a branch of the nearby Weitra. In 1483 the town was taken over by Hungarian King Matthias Corvinus. In the 16th and 17th century Gmünd was the venue of battles between Reformation and Counter-Reformation. In 1810 the citizens paid ransom to free themselves from the feudal system. In 1869 the railway line Eggenburg-Gmünd-Budweis (Ceske Budejovice) was opened, in 1871 the railway line Gmünd-Prague. In 1899 a District Authority was established in Gmünd.

The border town became the destination of many refugees. In 1914, during WWI, a hut camp for 40,000 refugees, mainly from Galicia and Bukovina, was set up. Based on the Peace Treaty of St. Germain, Gmünd lost most of its suburbs

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www.gmuend.at

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Provinz. Weitra
2008. ISBN 978-3-
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Manfred Dacho,
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Gmünd. Zeitver-
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to the new state Czechoslovakia. The communities adjoining Gmünd, Unter-Wielands and Böhmeil became the town České Velenice. The German-speaking people fled to the former hut camp. In 1938, when the Nazis were in power, the “historical border“ between Bohemia and Lower Austria was redrawn. České Velenice became the independent municipality “Gmünd-Bahnhof” and finally the town district “Gmünd III”. In 1945, towards the end of WWII., the district and the railway station were occupied by the Czechs, who reestablished the border of 1920. Gmünd III was renamed České Velenice. Just like Berlin, Gmünd was a divided city. For many decades the region along the “Iron Curtain” was dead. In 1964 the precious heath “Blockheide“ was declared a nature reserve.

After the collapse of the Communist system in 1989 and the opening of the border with Czechoslovakia, a completely new geopolitical situation was created. The city with about 6,000 inhabitants moved back to the centre of Europe and experienced a leap in innovation. The “ACCESS Industrial Park”, Europe’s first cross-border attraction of this kind, was inaugurated in 1994. The spa “Sole-Felsen-Bad” with salt-water pools on Lake Asang has pampered its numerous guests since 2006.

On 15 August 2008 Gmünd celebrated its 800th anniversary in a great ceremony (with Mozart’s “Coronation Mass“ in the Parish Church of the Sacred Heart in Gmünd Neustadt) and a festive procession to the fairground of Bleyleben, where traditions, the business community and social life of the Waldviertel were presented. In the fairground tent Mayor Otto Opelka held a speech stressing the social and economic achievements of the town and the region. Despite the party “Gmünd meets Hungary“ with fiery music, the presentation of Vice-Mayor and pharmacist Gottfried Libowitzky was the emotional highlight. He gave a touching interpretation of the “Song of Gmünd”, which Josef Pfandler, a headmaster, had written in 1968: “Town where the rivers flow together, town on the border, bridge to golden freedom“. Ernest Gabmann gave the festive speech, deputising for Lower Austrian Governor Pröll. The ceremony was moderated by Andreas Hausmann. The musical accompaniment included hunting horn players, who were joined by Wolf-gang Baumann, a textile manufacturer from Gmünd. ■

Minister congratulated Austrian researchers on ERC grants

Besides quantum physicist Anton Zeilinger and mathematician Ludmil Katzarkov (University of Vienna) previously awarded the “Advanced Grants“ of the European Research Council (ERC), high amounts of funding for pioneering frontier research now went to physicist Silke Bühler-Paschen (Vienna Technical University), quantum physicist Rainer Blatt (Innsbruck University) and nanotechnology researcher Falko Netzer (University of Graz).

In the next years mathematician Katzarkov will focus his research activities on abstract subjects of mathematics. Zeilinger’s planned research project revolves around basic questions of quantum physics. The grant will allow him to conduct new experiments in the field of research into fundamental tests of quantum mechanics and the technological possibilities of quantum information.

Minister of Science Johannes Hahn congratulated the University of Vienna on this huge success. “I also thank Rector Georg Winckler and his team for the excellent work, which provides the basis for this success“. Hahn was also highly pleased about the success of the other scientists. The selection of Silke Bühler-Paschen was highly welcomed for she had succeeded with her research project in a highly men-dominated discipline like physics. ■

Albertina: Van Gogh’s graphic work

The autumn exhibition of Vienna Albertina (5 September to 8 December 2008) presents Vincent van Gogh from a completely new perspective, combining his paintings and graphic work.

150 works of art, including 100 drawings, illustrate what a fundamental role his masterly draughtsmanship had played in developing his expressive brushstroke.

The treasures shown in the exhibition compiled by Albertina Director Klaus Albrecht Schröder are loans from all Van Gogh collections of the world. The show was created in cooperation with the Van Gogh Museum Amsterdam. It is the first Van Gogh exhibition in Austria after more than half a century. ■

Van Gogh. The Graphic Work:
www.albertina.at

The show in Vienna is the largest presentation of Van Gogh’s body of work since the anniversary exhibition in Amsterdam in 1990.

Austria's medal tally of the Olympic Games in Beijing

The super-sports year 2008 reached its climax after EURO with the 29th Olympic Summer Games in Beijing. For the seventy Austrian athletes selected by the Austrian Olympic Committee (ÖOC) the Games ended with mixed success: judoka Ludwig Paischer won a silver medal, swimmer Mirna Jukić and canoeist Violetta Oblinger-Peters received bronze for their outstanding performance. Four ÖOC athletes finished in the unrewarding fourth place, six Austrians ended up fifth. The three medals won by the team of the Austrian Olympic Committee corresponds to the number of medals won on average. 48 medals have been won in 16 Olympic Games by athletes competing under the red-white-red flag since 1948. In view of the total result of our athletes – in the medal ranking Austria shares place 23 with Ireland – the Secretariat of State for Sport will hold intensive “talks to explore new avenues” with the sports associations regarding the further development for the Winter Games in Vancouver in 2010 and the Summer Games in London in 2012. To ensure Austria's competitiveness at international level, these talks have to result in binding agreements. ■

Farewell to the Austrian Paralympics athletes

The XIII. Summer Paralympics under the motto “One World – One Dream“ will also take place in Beijing (6 to 17 September 2008). About 4,000 athletes will participate in this event. 417 medal competitions in 20 disciplines are held; Austria will participate in eight.

The Austrian Paralympic Committee (ÖPC) is represented with a total of 38 athletes: 34 men and 4 women.

Having won more medals than the ÖOC delegation in Olympic Games, the ÖPC team is the shining example of the Republic of Austria in Olympic Games. The Austrian athletes have received a total of 639 medals in the (Summer and Winter) Paralympic Games held since 1960: 201 gold medals, 220 silver and 218 bronze medals. The ÖOC team earned only 160 medals in the same period. ■

Barbara Spindler new BSO Secretary-General

Barbara Spindler was the first woman to be appointed to a key function in Austrian sports by the Federal Sport Organisation (BSO). The fact that the Executive Committee of the BSO took a unanimous decision on the successor of long-time Secretary-General Walter Pillwein demonstrates the quality of the woman previously working for the International Sports Division in the Federal Chancellery. Barbara Spindler is an expert in Austrian and international sports policy. During the Austrian EU Council Presidency, she was co-responsible for the key theme “sports and development cooperation”, earning herself a reputation in the office of the international working group “Sports for Development & Peace“. The fact that a woman will officially take over the reins of Austrian sports on 1 October 2008 is an important signal that the interests of women in organised sports are promoted. ■

Czech Karel Brückner new leader of ÖFB team

68-year-old Czech Karel Brückner succeeded to Josef Hickersberger as the coach of the national team of the ÖFB (Austrian Football Federation) on 1 August 2008. As the coach of the Czech national team, he did not miss any important tournament of the recent past with his team (European championships 2004 and 2008). Brückner led the team temporarily to the second place on the FIFA world ranking. The Czech Republic also participated in the World Cup 2006. Right at the beginning of his new job as ÖFB coach, Brückner achieved a remarkable 2:2 in the friendly match against world champion Italy. Now he faces great challenges with the Austrian national team: the qualification for the FIFA World Cup in South Africa in 2010, starting on 6 September 2008 with the match against vice-world champion France. ■

The legendary Czech team chief Karel Brückner will lead the Austrian national football team to the world championship.

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