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SPÖ and ÖVP agree on increase of the long-term care benefit

In the debate within the coalition government about anti-inflation measures, the Austrian Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) and the People's Party (ÖVP) have reached a consensus in the field of long-term care. As SPÖ chief Werner Faymann and ÖVP Federal Party Chairman, Vice-Chancellor Wilhelm Molterer confirmed on 28 August 2008 after a discussion on the anti-inflation package recently presented by the SPÖ, the two parties agreed on increasing the long-term care benefit.

They also signalled their willingness to discuss two other topics. They consider it for example possible to extend the effective date of the "heavy workers' regulation" ("Hacklerregelung") until 2013. ÖVP head Molterer announced a draft, which Faymann is prepared to examine. However, no joint decision involving automatic pension increases would be adopted, Faymann explained beforehand. Molterer could imagine to agree to paying the family allowance 13 times a year, probably even for children younger than six years.

However, the last two items of the SPÖ package arouse controversy. Molterer flatly rejects a 50% cut of the value-added tax rate for food and the abolishment of university fees. Faymann had explained before the meeting that the anti-inflation package would be pushed through still before the elections, even without the coalition partner. To meet all deadlines, the SPÖ plans to hold a special meeting of the National Council (1st chamber of Parliament) for proposing the motion (presumably on 18 September 2008). The resolution could then be adopted in the last plenary session on 24 September 2008 with the support of other majorities. ■

SPÖ and ÖVP presented their election programmes

On 28 September 2008 Austria will elect a new National Council. The two governing parties have presented their election programmes, ushering in the so-called "hot" phase of the election campaign. The five-point package of the SPÖ comprises major projects addressing anti-inflation measures, families and social affairs as well education.

Key demands are to reduce the value-added tax rate for food by 50%, to extend the effective date of the "heavy workers' regulations" until 2013, to pay the family allowance 13 times a year for all kids, including under-six-year-olds, to increase the long-term care benefit as well as to abolish university fees. SPÖ chief Faymann stated that by realising these five projects the tax reform would be advanced.

The ÖVP's election programme is also divided into five core areas: work, anti-inflation combat, long-term care, security and Europe. The People's Party calls for example for a tax reform in 2010 to ease the financial burden on the middle class, for a fund to finance long-term care from privatisation profits, harsher punishment of sexual offenders, depriving delinquent asylum-seekers of their asylum status as well as a "yes" to European integration and EU-wide referendums (e.g. on Turkey). The ÖVP also repositioned itself with its proposal to adjust childcare benefits to the income, which the SPÖ had originally demanded for several years. ■

President Fischer calls for speedy government formation

At the opening of the Wels Autumn & Agricultural Fair (3 to 7 September 2008), President Heinz Fischer called on the parties to form a government capable of acting quickly after the parliamentary election. Of course, the parties and politicians needed time to analyse the election result and hold in-depth talks. But the people should be guaranteed that no time was wasted in forming a Cabinet, Fischer said. Austria urgently needed a government fit for work that was ready to tackle unsolved problems. ■

Environmental protection is key political goal for young voters

Environmental protection is the most important political goal for young people. In a survey of the polling institute Ifes environmental protect came first with 71%, ahead of "self-realisation" (46%) and "order" (39%).

President Fischer:
"The population has a right to demand that no time is wasted in forming a new government and that work must be carried on speedily."

Politics should “do a lot more” for creating new housing (59%) and against youth unemployment (58%). The 1,200 young people (between 14 and 20) polled also stated that urgent action had to be taken against right-wing radicalism and xenophobia (51%).

82% considered politics to fulfil a crucial social role. For 85% active political commitment was important. They held diverging views on the fact that they were entitled to vote for the first time at the age of 16 years. 50% were in favour, 50% opposed. Due to the new young voters, the number of persons entitled to vote increases by about 160,000. ■

Austrian expatriates: voting easier thanks to new postal vote

By introducing the postal vote, major barriers to participating in the parliamentary elections on 28 September 2008 have been removed for about 500,000 Austrians living abroad, e.g. the need for witnesses. In a press interview on 4 September 2008, Gustav Chlesti, President of the World Association of Austrian Expatriates (Weltbund der Auslandsösterreicher / AÖWB) stressed his hope that the election turnout would increase. “A few thousand of votes had often been decisive for the election result”. The AÖWB also wanted to have a representative in Parliament, Chlesti said.

Instead of having to bring witnesses, it was now sufficient to depose an affidavit. More information on the election procedure for Austrian expatriates are provided on the websites of the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of the Interior:

www.wahlinfo.aussenministerium.at

www.bmi.gv.at/wahl08. ■

Chancellor Gusenbauer at special EU summit in Brussels

At its special summit on the Caucasus crisis (1 September 2008 in Brussels), the EU increased pressure on Russia. The next round of talks on the planned partnership agreement on security and energy issues with Moscow will be postponed until Russia withdraws its troops on from Georgia, as has been agreed on. However, the Union

refrained from adopting concrete sanctions against Russia. French President and incumbent EU Council President Nicolas Sarkozy and European Commission President José Manuel Barroso travelled together to Russia and Georgia on 8 September 2008. After their trip a decision will be taken on the future EU-Russia relations.

The EU has in the meantime promised Georgia that it was ready to conclude a free-trade agreement and to facilitate visa procedures. An international donor conference has also been planned.

As Federal Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer stated, the EU had given a “clear signal“ to Russia. France had prepared the emergency summit “very professionally and profoundly“, with a “clear perspective of détente and peaceful conflict settlement“, Gusenbauer said at the end of the meeting. “The escalation of emotions is not our business”. There was a “clear European approach to the crisis in Caucasus“, Gusenbauer emphasised. ■

Fischer and Napolitano in favour of Caucasus dialogue with Moscow

With regard to the present Caucasus crisis, President Heinz Fischer and his Italian counterpart Giorgio Napolitano also rely on the EU’s power to solve conflicts and on efforts to prevent Moscow’s isolation. In a telephone conversation the two heads of state came to the conclusion that cooperation between the EU and Russia as well as the planned partnership agreement were of fundamental importance, as the President’s Office informed on 4 September 2008. ■

International Human Rights Conference in Vienna

The International Human Rights Conference in Vienna (28/29 August 2008) called on all nations to set up independent national human rights institutions and to give them a mandate to implement binding international standards at local level. ■

Austrian expatriates no longer require witnesses for postal voting

Summer tourism developing favourably

The summer tourist season has so far developed highly satisfactorily as evidenced by the favourable hotel figures in May (+16.4%) and July (+2.8%). In the period May to July about 30.8 million hotel nights were registered, corresponding to a year-on-year plus of 3.8%. According to the Austrian Statistical Office (Statistik Austria) the hotel bookings of Austrians rose by 1.1% to 9.7 million and those of foreign guests by 5.0% to 21.09 million.

Minister for Economic Affairs Martin Bartenstein stated in a press release that this interim result could be attributed "above all to the excellent economic conditions and the competitiveness of the domestic tourist industry". Bartenstein showed himself "convinced" that the "favourable news reports before and during EURO 2008 had contributed to this favourable interim result". The guests from Germany rank first with 11.4 million hotel nights (+4.4%), followed by visitors from the Netherlands (+3.6%) and Italy (+3.1%). ■

OeNB boss Nowotny proposes joint anti-inflation measures

In the combat against inflation the new head of the Austrian National Bank (OeNB), Ewald Nowotny, demands a "wide cooperation in economic policy" at national level. The Austrian National Bank would be ready to fulfil a coordination function. At his inauguration press conference on 5 September 2008, Nowotny envisaged a "new big bargain", i.e. a closing of ranks of all decision-makers as soon as possible after the election. The currently declining crude oil prices offered an opportunity to control inflation. Nowotny demanded a "sensitive" approach to wage and price policies. Automatic increases of fees or rents should be postponed. ■

Unemployment rate declined for the 30th time in a row

In August another decline in the number of unemployed persons was recorded. With the number of jobseekers dropping by 7,297

persons (or 3.8%) to 183,929, this decline has been even slightly more significant than that registered in July (-3.6%). Minister for Economics Bartenstein informed at a labour market press conference on 1 September 2008 that the unemployment rate (based on the EU method) stood at 4.2% in July.

Bartenstein referred to a "satisfactory result" but also admitted that the best times were over. Austria was, however, still growing faster than the remaining euro-zone.

The decline in unemployment was particularly strong in the building sector (-7.7%) and the tourist industry (-6.7%), Bartenstein stated. Women's unemployment dropped by 4.1% compared to the previous year. Young people registered a minus by 1.4% (31,852 persons) from the level of August 2007. The number of older jobseekers aged 50 plus increased by 0.5% (36,559). ■

AUA sale: first round of bids ends on 12 September 2008

The list of the potential buyers of Austrian Airlines (AUA) was reduced by half even before the first round of bids. According to the weekly "News" (4 September), only seven candidates of originally 12 wanted to buy the air carrier heading for privatisation.

As "News" informed, the German Lufthansa, Air France/KLM, British Airways, Air China, Siberian S7, Russian Aeroflot as well as a consortium of industrialists are competing for AUA. This has not yet been confirmed by AUA and the holding company ÖIAG, the main shareholder owned by the government (42.75% of the shares). The result of the first round of bids will become available on 12 September 2008. ■

OMV gas power plant in Turkey

The OMV group will build a 890-megawatt capacity gas power plant in Samsun on the Turkish Black Sea coast. The total investment volume is about 500 million euros, about 60% will be provided by the OMV (300 million euros). Construction will start still this year. The power plant will be put into operation in 2010. ■

From May to July 2008, Austria registered about 30.8 million hotel bookings. This is a plus of 3.8% compared to the same period of 2007.

OeNB Governor Nowotny: "All home-made components of inflation have to be kept as low as possible. All market participants should quickly pass on decreases in the raw materials prices to consumers."

Meeting on Austrian culture abroad: "Intercultural Dialogue"

"Intercultural Dialogue" was the motto of this year's meeting on "Austrian Culture Abroad" at Wien Museum am Karlsplatz on 4 September 2008. As the head of the Department for Cultural Policy of the Federal Ministry of European and International Affairs Emil Brix explained, there was "no other topic currently being of more relevance to culture and politics".

Several working groups, in which representatives of Austria's Cultural Forums in Tokyo, Paris, Milan and London, but also Director-General designate of the Museum of Cultural History Sabine Haag participated, discussed the role of international cooperation in culture. Subsequently, a panel – including rectors of Austrian universities, the speaker of the Islamic Religious Community Amina Baghajati, ethnologist Andre Gingrich as well as Minister of Education Claudia Schmied – explored the question how greater importance could be attached to "the significance of cultural learning in Austria". The festive speech was given by Stephane Martin, Director-General of the Museum "Quai Branly" in Paris.

Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik gave a much-noted opening statement, advocating the establishment of a Competence Centre for Intercultural Mediation. "We need practitioners and feasible know-how acquisition in this area. Empress Maria Theresa had already a vision of knowledge transfer when she founded the Diplomatic Academy". The involvement of women in intercultural dialogue was also crucial. "They represent 50 percent of the potential in our society". Plassnik also highlighted the intercultural importance of art. "Artists are those forcing others by means of their art to leave their "cages", in terms of language and experience. We should stand up every day and try to break the bars of our cages".

In her statement Sabine Haag stressed the importance of museums as places creating an identity and of cultural diplomacy. Museums were like ice-breakers, and exhibitions initiated a "process of reflection". ■

"Perception and Decision" at Forum Alpbach

This year's European Forum Alpbach revolved around the general theme "Perception and Decision".

International politicians, diplomats, representatives of the economy and scholars from 81 countries discussed the financing of the health system, international political issues (e.g. Europe's relations with the USA and Russia) as well as European partnerships at their get-together (ending on 30 August 2008) in Alpbach, a mountain village in Tyrol.

Among the prominent guests were Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel as well as ambassadors to the UN Zalmay Khalilzad (USA) and Vitaly Churkin (Russia). Numerous high-ranking representatives of the economic sector and several Nobel Prize winners in chemistry and physics like Jean-Marie Lehn of Louis Pasteur University (Strasbourg) and the College de France (Paris), Peter Grünberg (Jülich Research Centre), Wolfgang Ketterle (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) as well as Gerard 't Hooft of the Spinoza Institute (Utrecht University) gave lectures in Alpbach.

3,000 participants came to Alpbach, among them 450 students. ■

"Austrian Days" in Ukraine with authors and jazz musicians

"Contemporary literature from Austria" was the title of this year's international presentation of authors at the book fair in Lviv (German name: Lemberg).

Ten Austrian authors, among them Andrea Winkler, Julian Schutting and Ferdinand Schmatz, pay a visit to Ukraine from 11 to 18 September 2008 based on an initiative of the Austrian literary centre "Alte Schmiede". Gerhard Rühm, Friedrich Achleitner, Peter Waterhouse and Olga Flor give bilingual readings with their Ukrainian colleagues, among them Yuri Andrukhovych, Oksana Sabuchko and Andrey Kurkov in the literary cafés and theatres of Lviv. Ukrainian and Russian

www.alpbach.org

**Federal Chancellor
Alfred
Gusenbauer:
The future of the
market economy**
www.bundeskanzleramt.at

translators and writers like Serhiy Zhadan, Tomofiy Havrilyv, Mark Belorussez and Mojsey Fishbejn presented their translations of works by Musil, Celan, Jandl and of Bernhard's "Heldenplatz" in the "Molody Teatr" in Kiev.

A special Ukrainian edition of the magazine "Hammer-Zeitung" published by Alte Schmiede in Vienna, has appeared to mark these events by presenting texts of the participants. The Ukrainians will pay their "literary return visit" in the framework of the festival "Literature in Autumn". This year the festival taking place in Vienna's theatre Odeon from 14 to 16 November 2008 is dedicated to Ukrainian literature.

The music of the two events is arranged and performed by the "Third Stream" musicians Franz Koglmann (composition, trumpet und flügelhorn) and Oskar Aichinger (composition, piano). ■

Franz Liszt Festival in Raiding

The Franz Liszt Festival in Raiding, the Austrian place of birth of the composer near the Hungarian border, has flourished since its inception and presents important innovations this year. A second Liszt Festival was already held in June (and will be held in also in the future) but the "traditional" Liszt Festival will be staged in the architecturally superb Concert Hall from 15 to 19 October 2008. The purist building designed by the Rotterdam-based studio Kempe Thill (impressively realised by Woschitz Engineering) won the Innovation Prize of Burgenland in 2006 and the Prize for Architecture of Burgenland this year. The forthcoming festival presents pianists Tzimon Barto, Johannes & Eduard Kutrowatz, "Markells Stimmen" – the chamber choir of the Philharmonic Orchestra Novosibirsk, actress Gudrun Landgrebe, who will recite Marquis de Sade and Guy de Maupassant with the Liszt piano accompaniment by Florian Uhlig. The festival "liszteni-raiding" will be closed with a Sunday matinee under the motto "Breathe gently, my song" on 19 October 2008, in which tenor Keith Lewis will sing rare Liszt songs with texts by Schiller, Goethe, Heine, Hugo, perfectly accompanied by pianist Melvyn Tan. ■

Salzburg Jazz Autumn 2008

The Jazz Autumn festival in Salzburg initiated by Johannes Kunz in 1996 has developed into an important and globally renowned festival. Salzburg has also offered a jazz gala at the opening of the Salzburg Festival every July since 2004. The best of jazz seems to be just good enough for Salzburg. The Jazz Autumn will be opened in the Salzburg Residence on 30 October 2008 by Governor Gabi Burgstaller. Carole Alston will sing. The American living in Vienna caused a sensation with a Billie Holiday programme at Vienna's English Theatre in 2006. On 31 October 2008 the trio of US pianist Brad Mehldau will perform in the hall of Salzburg University. Brauwelt will be the venue for the Marc Ribot Trio. On 1 November 2008 the Wolfgang Muthspiel 4tet and exceptional trumpeter Dave Douglas will perform there. Jazz singer Stacey Kent will give a concert at Salzburg Congress. The Austrian brass septet Mnozil Brass with spectacular trumpeter (Hans Koller Prize 2004) Thomas Gansch performs at Brauwelt on 2 November 2008. The tap dance performance "Short Stories" by Manhattan Tap on the same day will be wildly acclaimed by the audience in Salzburg. On 4 November 2008 the Louis Hayes Cannonball Legacy Band (in commemoration of legendary alto saxophone player Julian "Cannonball" Adderley, 1928-1975) will bring bustling energy to the university hall. Among the performances of the following days are: "jazz singer of the year 2007" Kurt Elling from Chicago, Ulita Knaus from Hamburg, the Randy Weston African Rhythm Trio, the Amina Claudine Myers Trio, Mariza – Queen Of Fado, Enrico Rava with Eberhard Weber and Reto Weber, Martin Breinschmid & Broadway Big Band, singer Dianne Reeves and German trumpeter Till Brönner. On 9 November 2008 the Jazz Autumn will come to its end in the Great Festival Hall with the Chick Corea & John McLaughlin Project starring Kenny Garrett, Christian McBride and Vinny Colaiuta. ■

A Jazz Festival for Salzburg - this year's outstanding programme of the Jazz Autumn is under the motto "Stars and Stripes", a march composed by John Philip Sousa in 1897.

www.viennaentertainment.com

The curator of the Austrian jazzers is Klaus Schulz, a leading expert from Vienna.

Franz Liszt Centre in Raiding: Franz Liszt Straße 48, 7321 Raiding.

www.franz-liszt.at

Commemorative plaque for Leon Zelman

A commemorative plaque for Leon Zelman, the founder of the “Jewish Welcome Service“, was placed on the façade of Palais Epstein in Vienna. As the guests of honour – among them Speaker of Parliament Barbara Prammer, Vienna’s Vice-Mayor Renate Brauner and Executive Councillor for Culture Andreas Mailath-Pokorny – stressed, tribute was paid to Zelman for his contribution to the dialogue between Jews and Non-Jews. In his festive speech Israeli journalist Rath reminded of Zelman’s achievements, who – still suffering from the after-effects of the years spent in the concentration camp – had come to Vienna in 1946 to translate his dreams of a new society into reality. The “House of History and Tolerance“, which Zelman wanted to realise in Palais Epstein had not become a reality but the Democracy Workshop at Palais Epstein was certainly an initiative in his spirit.

Leon Zelman had founded the “Jewish Welcome Service“ in 1980. The objective of the non-profit organisation has been to engage in international public relations work for Jewish culture in Austria to contribute to a “better understanding between Jews and Non-Jews“, Vienna’s Mayor Michael Häupl stated in homage to Zelman. Trips to Vienna organised in the framework of the programme “Welcome to Vienna“ were at the heart of these “confidence-building measures“. To date about 4,000 Austrians displaced in the wake of Austria’s “annexation” to Nazi Germany and their family members were invited to visit their former home country. With his initiative Leon Zelman raised the awareness of Jewish culture in Austria.

At the age of 12 years, Zelman was deported with his family to the Lodz ghetto, where he lost his parents. Via Auschwitz, where his brother died in 1944, he came to the Ebensee camp. The severely ill was freed in 1945 by US troops. After spending three years in different hospitals, Zelman studied journalism in Vienna and became a leading official of the Jewish Students’ Association. In 1951 he founded the magazine “Das Jüdische Echo“ (still existing today), which he headed as editor-in-chief. Professor Leon

Zelman received several awards, e.g. the Golden Doctoral Diploma of the University of Vienna and the Golden Badge of Honour for Meritorious Service to the Republic of Austria. ■

KAÖ: special commemoration of the November pogroms 1938

The November pogroms, during which the Nazis killed Jewish people and burnt down synagogues within the German’s sphere of influence 70 years ago, will be commemorated in a very special way this year. The Austrian Catholic Action (Katholische Aktion Österreich/KAÖ) accepted the proposal of the Coordination Committee for Christian-Jewish Cooperation to organise ecumenical vigils in places where there were synagogues before November 1938 or where there is still a Jewish cemetery. The vigils to be held on 9 November 2008 will also remind of the fact that the Churches and Christians had also “separated themselves from God” by permitting, even supporting the outrages. Every form of anti-Semitism was a sin, as the Churches had realised clearly after the Shoah.

In Vienna the parishes where district synagogues were located before November 1938 will participate in the commemoration by holding vigils. As 9 November 2008 is a Sunday, the subject is to be addressed in as many church services as possible.

The KAÖ also decided to hold a colloquium on “Resistance for religious reasons” in spring 2009. The “Mauthausen Committee Austria“, in which representatives of the Churches are represented, will also focus on this theme in the liberation celebrations in 2009. Another priority will be to publicise the touring exhibition about 51 martyrs from among KAÖ, which is presented in the parish “Marcel Callo” in Linz, named after a beatified young French Catholic Action member, who was killed in Mauthausen.

In Burgenland, which had belonged to Hungary until 1921/22, important events will be staged to commemorate the previously strong presence of Jewish communities. ■

www.parlament.gv.at

With the help of “Falter“ editor-in-chief Armin Thurnher, Leon Zelman published his autobiography “Ein Leben nach dem Überleben“ (Verlag Kremayr & Scheriau) in 1995. The English translation “After Survival” was published by Holmes & Meier in New York in 1998.

www.jewish-welcome.at

Programme for the future of the Austrian sport

As the legislative period is drawing to a close, Secretary of State for Sport Reinhold Lopatka presented his “10-point programme” for Austria’s future sports policy. Based on his experience as a Secretary of State for Sport of the past two years, Lopatka wants to develop an approach for the future. Thanks to the excellently organised EURO as well as the Anti-Doping Act including the implementation of the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) Austria and the largest exercise programme for children and young people of the Second Republic starting in the school year 2008/09, important steps have been taken for the Austrian sport. In terms of sports policy, the success is reflected in more money for mass, health and high-performance sports. The programme focuses on the preparations for the Olympic Games in 2010 and 2012 as well as on mass and health sports, especially to promote sport already at nurseries. In Austria the structures in high-performance sport need to be further professionalised. Targeted funding for elite sport has to be enhanced and evaluated by using methods of sports science. It is important to eliminate “parallel structures” and set up a central platform for promoting elite sport. In the medium term a large centralised sports institution will be established also in Austria – analogously to Swiss Olympic or the German Olympic Sports Federation – to bundle the resources for high-performance, mass and health sports. The negative development in the area of physical exercise and sport at Austrian schools recently criticised in the report of the Court of Auditors and in an EU study has to be seen as a mandate to intensify activities in the field of school and health sports. ■

Successful marketing of Austria at EURO 08

EURO 2008 was a global football party, which was successfully advertised in Austria and abroad. The Austrian embassies and cultural forums abroad took advantage of EURO to launch well-aimed marketing strategies for Austria. In numerous

professionally organised events with a wide appeal Austria was showcased as a cosmopolitan, modern and vibrant country around the globe. Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik and Secretary of State for Sport Reinhold Lopatka presented the awards for the most creative projects at the Ambassadors’ Conference 2008 in Vienna. The wide spectrum of very original events reached from youth football tournaments with local schools, e.g. in Brazil or Israel, and VIP matches with Hollywood stars in Los Angeles to football exhibitions in New York, Berlin or Rome. ■

More exercise and sport at our schools

Almost every fifth child in Austria is overweight, almost half of them are obese. Therefore the battle against overweight and for healthier, more active lives has to be started already at nurseries and schools.

In the school year 2008/09 the largest exercise campaign of the Second Republic will be launched. More than two million euros are made available by the federal government for an exercise programme in nurseries and primary schools. The foundation for a healthier lifestyle has to be laid already in early infancy and movement has to become part of the every-day lives of the children. Our kids are to be motivated to do more exercise immediately after attending the nursery. In cooperation with “Fit for Austria“ and the three sports federations (Sportunion, ASKÖ and ASVÖ), various initiatives are to be taken to stir the interest of children in exercise and sport at day schools, in voluntary classes and “movement & sports” classes but also in lessons forming part of the regular curriculum. Direct links with the sports clubs are to be established. Best practice models such as “Taking a break for exercise“ are to be promoted countrywide. The recently published report of the Federal Court of Auditors underlines the importance of this topic and criticises the cutbacks in “movement & sports“ classes in the past years. ■

For the “10-point programme” see:
www.sport.austria.gv.at