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Economic package: Chancellor Faymann expects 8 billion euros

Work on this year's political agenda started with the traditional closed-door meetings of the parties represented in Parliament. The beginning was made by the two governing parties, the Social Democrats (SPÖ) and the People's Party (ÖVP).

In its two-day New Year's meeting in the city of Salzburg (9/10 January 2009), the SPÖ's federal party executive committee devoted itself entirely to the combat against unemployment and the economic crisis. Prestigious economic experts were also invited. Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann informed reporters once more of the importance of the sets of measures adopted. Faymann expects that they will total about 8 billion euros. To the approximately 5 billion euros of the federal government, the Länder would add 2.5 to 3 billion euros. The Chancellor stressed that "unemployment" would be high on the agenda also in the near future.

Infrastructure Minister Doris Bures announced her plan to safeguard about 50,000 jobs by investing 20 billion euros in road and rail by 2013. All projects with strong employment effects should be prioritised. Minister for Women's Affairs Gabriele Heinisch-Hosek wants to tackle the inequality of women in the labour market and announced a qualification programme targeting women. In addition, measures will be taken to improve the reconciliation of working and family lives. Minister for Education Claudia Schmied underlined that investments of a total of 600 million euros were earmarked for restructuring and enlarging schools. About 4,300 additional teachers are to be employed by 2013.

Faymann emphasised that, if absolutely necessary, a third economic stimulus package would be prepared in case the measure taken to tackle the economic crisis proved insufficient.

In an interview with the magazine "Format" on 16 January 2008 Faymann did not rule out that further action would be taken in the context of the tax reform, which deliberately targeted small and medium income earners in the hope "that the additional money would immediately flow into consumption". It was also a psychological issue to strengthen the purchasing power – "in times like these it means half the rent if people see that the result is more net of the gross", Faymann stated.

One week after the SPÖ, the coalition partner ÖVP gathered for a meeting behind closed doors. On 14 January 2009 Vice-Chancellor and

Minister of Finance Josef Pröll presented a draft on the tax reform in Pamhagen (Burgenland), which was submitted for review on the same day. The tax reform is to enter into force after Eastern, with retroactive effect 1 January 2009. According to Pröll, the volume of the package was 3.76 billion euros. It included – as stipulated in the government agreement with the SPÖ – a reform of tax rates, new tax deductions for families and the tax deductibility of donations to charitable organisations. The tax rate reform is to ease the financial strain on all wage taxpayers (higher marginal tax rates and income thresholds) but also on entrepreneurs by stepping up tax allowances. The measures taken for families alone (e.g. increase in deductible amounts for children, deductibility of childcare expenses, payment of 13 family allowances per year since September 2008) were a "relief worth a 15th monthly salary", Pröll informed. This corresponds to tax savings of about 2,000 to 3,000 euros per family and year.

All other parliamentary parties gathered on 18 January 2009: The Freedom Party (FPÖ) and the Greens in Klagenfurt, the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ) in Salzburg. ■

Minister of Justice Claudia Bandion-Ortner sworn in

Former judge Claudia Bandion-Ortner (who earned herself a reputation in the BAWAG case) was sworn in as new Minister of Justice by President Fischer on 15 January 2009. Now Chancellor Werner Faymann's government team is complete after more than a month. Bandion-Ortner's assumption of office has been delayed as the written judgement in the BAWAG case had to be finalised. In first interviews the new Minister of Justice announced for instance tougher action against child pornography. ■

National Council: committee adopted provisional budget

On 13 January 2009 the Budget Committee of the National Council gave the go-ahead for the provisional budget for the early months of 2009. The government request was approved with the votes of the SPÖ and ÖVP. The 2008 Federal Finance Act remains in force up to the adoption of the new budget. The new Federal Finance Act is to be passed by Parliament in late May. A biennial budget 2009/2010 has been planned. ■

Austria protests against restart of Bohunice

Despite the agreement in the gas crisis and the contract to be signed between Russia and Ukraine on 19 January 2009, the EU does not believe in a final solution of the gas conflict as long as gas flows to Europe are not resumed. In Austria's neighbouring country Slovakia the gas shortage seems to have been temporarily relieved as the Czech Republic is stepping in with gas supplies. The controversial plans to restart the decommissioned reactor of the Jaslovské Bohunice nuclear power plant were not given up but would be reconsidered in a potential emergency situation, as Bratislava informed.

Austria reacted with harsh criticism to the repeated announcements of restarting the reactor of the Bohunice NPP close to the Austrian border. In accordance with the Slovak EU accession treaty, the problematic reactor had been shut down at the turn of the year. This had been particularly an Austrian concern. But also the European Union is against a restart and threatened to institute proceedings for violating the EU treaties if necessary.

At a meeting with his Slovak counterpart Jan Kubis in Vienna on 15 January 2009, Austrian Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger described the planned reactivation of the decommissioned reactor a "clear violation of the EU accession treaty". According to a press release of the Foreign Ministry, the Slovak government had repeatedly been informed of Austria's decisive stance in the last few days. While fully understanding the "difficult energy policy situation" of the Slovak Republic, it could "not be accepted that an obsolete reactor not conforming to state-of-the-art security standards will be reconnected to the grid", Spindelegger said. The Bohunice nuclear power plant affected the safety of the Austrians but also of the Slovak people. Based on the in-situ report of the Austrian expert of the Ministry of the Environment no technical preparations have been made for rebooting the reactor; this has been confirmed by Austrian Minister for Environment Nikolaus Berlakovich in a statement on the Austrian TV (ORF) on 18 January 2009.

Austria's massive protests were also conveyed by Economic Minister Reinhold Mitterlehner to the EU Energy Council of Ministers in Brussels on 12 January 2009. The EU had been requested to initiate "measures and steps", including a fact-

finding mission and treaty violation proceedings against Slovakia, even action before the European Court of Justice (ECJ). For Austria this was a "matter of principle" and one had to avoid that a precedent would be set for others, Mitterlehner explained. Bulgaria had similar plans.

Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann is reported to have presented Austria's position explicitly to Prime Minister Fico in a telephone conversation. After the Council of Ministers on 13 January 2009, Faymann informed that the rebooting of the Bohunice NPP would be a "clear breach" of the EU accession treaty. In an interview with "Tiroler Tageszeitung" (17 January 2009) Faymann underlined Austria's definite no to nuclear power. ■

Faymann visits Switzerland

Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann paid his first bilateral visit to Switzerland on 7 January 2009. In Bern he met inter alia with Swiss President and Minister of Finance Hans-Rudolf Merz. Both sides stressed that they wanted to combat the financial crisis jointly. Faymann highlighted the importance of international cooperation: "Coordinated action had more power and significance than individual measures". ■

UN Security Council: Austria pleads for immediate truce in Gaza

On 6 January 2009 Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger participated for the first time in a meeting of the UN Security Council in New York, of which Austria is a member for a two-year period. Spindelegger called for an immediate and lasting truce between Israel and the radical Islamic Hamas movement in Gaza, unimpeded deliveries of humanitarian aid as well as the strict observation of humanitarian laws and human rights. ■

Ushering in the Austria-Japan Year 2009 in Tokyo

To mark the 140th anniversary of the Austrian-Japanese Friendship Treaty (1869), the "Austria-Japan Year 2009" is celebrated with numerous events. In the preliminaries of the festivities, Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger will travel to Tokyo from 23 to 25 January 2009. Federal President Heinz Fischer plans to pay an official visit to Japan during this year. ■

Government announced master plan for “renewable energy“

With the signing of an agreement to settle the gas conflict between Russia and Ukraine scheduled for 19 January 2009, an end of the energy crisis seems near. However, some details still need to be clarified. At the time of publication of this article, it was still unclear when the gas tap will really be opened and the gas flow to Europe will be restored.

Economic Minister Reinhold Mitterlehner welcomed the announced settlement of the gas conflict between Russia and Ukraine: “I hope that an agreement has finally been reached and that gas will again start flowing on Monday“, Mitterlehner stated on 18 January 2009 to APA (Austria Press Agency) as well as in the TV programme “Pressestunde“ of the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF). For Austria the most important lesson learned in the gas conflict was that it should promote the expansion of the share of renewable energies in the energy supply to an even greater extent than in the past. In concrete terms this means more hydroelectric power, biomass, wind energy and photovoltaics. However, it was an illusion that this would end the dependence on oil and gas. Austria’s ‘no’ to nuclear power was upheld, Mitterlehner stated.

The oil company OMV expressed cautious optimism: “Every signal in this direction is positive“, OMV spokesman Thomas Huemer said. The OMV was waiting until the gas was really flowing. According to Huemer, further talks would also be held by the consortium, which is to prepare a common solution for the supply of working gas (to produce the necessary pressure in the pipelines). A solution was hoped for, Huemer said. Besides E.ON Ruhrgas, the Italian ENI, Wingas and the French GdF Suez, the OMV forms part of the consortium which could supply the necessary technical gas for operating the distributing systems and help to end the conflict.

According to the OMV, the gas supplies to Austrian households and industrial plants are secure for another three months (as from the delivery stop). However, the question about consequences of the gas crisis and measures to secure energy supplies arises also in this context.

Chancellor Werner Faymann and Vice-Chancellor Josef Pröll announced a master plan for “renewable energies” already after the Council of Ministers on 13 January 2009. In this way the federal government wants to prevent energy crises

as they could be provoked by situations like the current gas delivery stop. According to Pröll, measures foreseen were for example to promote alternative energies and to boost energy efficiency. A main goal in strengthening alternative energy in Austria is to speed up approval procedures for hydroelectric power plant projects, in particular to shorten environmental impact assessment procedures, Pröll informed. Economic Minister Mitterlehner and Minister of the Environment Nikolaus Berlakovich were put in charge of preparing the master plan. ■

Automotive summit: green light for longer short-time working

At the so-called “automotive summit” at the Federal Chancellery on 8 January 2009, the federal government, the social partners and the automotive industry agreed on extending short-time working to up to 18 months and on more research funds for innovative companies. The measures will be applied to all companies hit by the crisis, not only the automotive sector.

Domestic car components suppliers, car dealers and workshops employ about 170,000 people; with an output of approximately 23 billion euros they represent 10% of the manufacturing industry. They are among those affected most severely by the economic slump. Therefore it was vital to support this sector, Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann stressed, who had hosted the automotive summit together with Vice-Chancellor and Finance Minister Josef Pröll. The top item on the agenda was however the question how to support a sector without distorting competition, giving unfair preferential treatment to some companies or even causing “imbalances in the whole system with certain subsidy models”, Faymann stated.

The companies needed first and foremost flexibility, reaffirmed also Pröll, “because we know that the upswing will come“. Until then the employees should be held by the companies. Therefore the short-time working arrangement would be extended to 18 months. Public financial contributions and a qualification campaign would be introduced. Details like extending the assessment period (of currently four weeks) are to be developed by a working group. In the past companies could introduce short-time working for 6 or a maximum of 12 months. According to Minister for Social Affairs Rudolf Hundstorfer, the Amendment is to be adopted by Parliament in March. ■

Porgy: Fritz Pauer celebrates his State Prize for Improvised Music

Pianist Fritz Pauer, 65, one of the pioneering personalities in the Austrian music scene, was awarded the Austrian State Prize for Improvised Music in the framework of the Hans Koller Prizes in November 2008. This important prize had previously been received by his pianist colleague Joe Zawinul, saxophonist and painter Hans Koller as well as trumpeter and composer Michael Mantler.

Aged only 17 years, the artist born in Vienna was a member of the band of Austria's then probably most important jazzier, clarinettist Fatty George. He also jammed with bassist Ray Brown and singer Ella Fitzgerald. Other important stages in his successful career were the ORF Bigband, the Erich Kleinschuster Sextett and becoming the leader of the Swiss Jazz School in Bern.

The achievements of the pianist in the quintet of the legendary Afro-American trumpeter and fluegelhorn player Art Farmer (1928-1999) are unforgotten. In 1968 Farmer decided to live primarily in Vienna, made Pauer a band member and recorded with him the sensitive duo "Azure" (1987).

On 10 January 2009 the Vienna-based jazz club Porgy & Bess dedicated the evening to the exceptional pianist, to celebrate the State Prize. With a traditional Hard Bop cast – Daniel Nösig (t), Andy Middleton (ts), Johannes Strasser (b) and Joris Dudli (d) – Fritz Pauer also interpreted compositions from Art Farmer's repertoire. In summer 1999 the two of them had given a moving concert at the residence of then US Ambassador in Vienna – in the same night the trumpeter suffering from severe health problems collapsed. But not even the skills of the doctors in a hospital in New York could save him. ■

Gert Jonke: death of a text-composer

The lyric poet, dramatist, narrator and author of radio plays from Klagenfurt (Carinthia) Gert Jonke is said to have known about his severe cancer for a long time. Wasting away, Jonke continued working relentlessly up to his death. On 4 January 2009 he passed away aged 62 after his battle with cancer.

In his home town Jonke attended a grammar school with a focus on Latin and Greek and the

Conservatoire of Carinthia. In 1966 the highly musical young man studied not only musicology but also German language and literature, history and philosophy at Vienna University and attended the Film and Television Academy. After staying and working in Western Berlin, London, in the Middle East and Latin America, Jonke has lived as an independent writer in Austria since 1978.

He received numerous awards, e.g. the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize, the Franz Kafka Prize of the City of Klosterneuburg (Lower Austria), the Grand Austrian State Prize for Literature, the Kleist and Nestroy Theatre Prize.

Jonke's style was – based on the socio-critical language scepticism of experimental literature – influenced by concrete poetry techniques. His debut (1969) with "Geometrischer Heimatroman" ("Geometric Regional Novel") had a disturbing effect not only on his Carinthian compatriots. Jonke's "Dogville" was a village with a rectangular square in the middle, the village dwellers were subject to and pestered by strict rules of the authorities.

In 1979 one of his most beautiful prose texts was published: "Der ferne Klang" ("The Distant Sound"), stating for example: "If more people (...) would talk to themselves in a formal way instead of permanently fraternising with themselves, a lot or everything would be different". This sentence could be by Anton Webern. He felt very close to the minimalist-beautiful geometrically constructed music of the avant-gardists of the "Second Vienna School".

In 1990 the "theatre sonata" "Sanftwut oder Der Ohrenmaschinist" ("Gentle Fury, or the Ear Engineer"), which was performed with deaf actor Werner Mössler at Theater des Augenblick in Vienna in 2006 as a premiere in sign language. In 2005 his play "Die versunkene Kathedrale" ("The Sunken Cathedral") was honoured with being performed at Akademietheater.

Literature Nobel Prize laureate Elfriede Jelinek said about her deceased colleague full of admiration: "With two, three words noted down he could create a whole universe."

Minister of Culture Claudia Schmied paid a similar tribute: "For Gert Jonke language was more than the poetry of words and a mere tool for conveying messages. For him words opened up new worlds and represented ideas that were to encourage reflection".

The great author was buried in a tomb of honour of the City of Vienna at the Central Cemetery on 19 January 2009. ■

Joseph Haydn also in the spotlight of the Vienna OsterKlang 2009

Anniversary year celebrity Joseph Haydn as well as Georg Friedrich Händel are in the spotlight of the Vienna OsterKlang Festival held at six different venues in Vienna from 4 to 13 April 2009. Almost 10,000 tickets are available for the festival – with the Passion of Jesus Christ being also this year's theme. By tradition, the OsterKlang Festival is opened by the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, for the first time under the musical leadership of Riccardo Muti, who will conduct not only *Messa Solenne* by Luigi Cherubini but also Haydn at Musikverein on 4 and 5 April 2009. His "Seven Words of Christ on the Cross" are also the source material for a new composition by Helmut Jasbar: "It is Friday and God is not here" is the title of the piece for string quintet, a narrator and video installation (premiered at Konzerthaus).

Händel's "Messiah" receives its premiere (conducted by Jean-Christophe Spinosi and directed by Claus Guths) at Theater an der Wien already on 27 March 2009 – OsterKlang provides for two additional performances. The co-production with the Opera de Nancy is broadcast on the Austrian and French TV. On 9 April 2009 Händel will be juxtaposed with modern instrumental works at Minoritenkirche (Minorite Church). On 8 April 2009 Händel meets Haydn and "Stabat Mater" conducted by Martin Haselböck at the Chapel of Hofburg. At Semper Depot a production of the New Opera Vienna is on the programme as from 4 April 2009: Harrison Birtwistle's "The Last Supper" gives young, less known singers an opportunity to shine as Disciples of Christ. Director is Philipp Harnoncourt.

A second premiere will be held at Minorite Church on Good Friday, 10 April 2009, with "Totentanz" ("Death Dance") by Wolfgang Sauseng (music) and Wolfgang Hermann (text), who embarked on "Setting to music medieval frescos". The Minorite Church will again be filled with medieval ambience on Easter Monday, when Jordi Savall and Montserrat Figueras bring Iberian pilgrim songs with the Ensemble XXI to Vienna. www.osterklang.at ■

Generous support of Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra for charity

The New Year's concert of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Daniel

Barenboim was awarded Platinum on the very day the album was launched. This makes it one of the commercially most successful concerts of the orchestra. The Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra informed in a press release already on 8 January 2009 that they would make a would New Year's donation of 100,000 euros to charity projects in the framework of the campaign "Licht ins Dunkel" ("Light into the Dark"). Six charitable institutions and projects in Austria are supported: Katastrophenhilfe österreichischer Frauen (Austrian Women's Disaster Relief Fund), the emergency aid fund "Familie in Not" (Family in Need), the association "Rainbows", St. Anna Children's Hospital, Neuner-Haus and "Viva – Vienna's integrative children's theatre". ■

Linz09: Hummel's opera "Fouché" irritates and arouses enthusiasm

The Capital of Culture Year "Linz09" celebrated its first music theatre highlight – a production that was performed unfortunately only three times up to 15 January 2009: the "drama-opera" "Fouché" by German composer Franz Hummel (69). The commissioned work of Linz09 was staged in a production by LIVA (Linzer Veranstaltungsgesellschaft / Linz Events Agency) in the cultural centre Posthof. The genre "drama-opera" is based on the composer's idea of developing the title role of the opera as a speaking part, for "bad people don't have songs". The agile Joseph Fouché – portrayed already in 1929 in Stefan Zweig's probably best novel – was a police minister during the French Revolution. Under the Napoleonic regime he became a mass killer, as evidenced in the annals of history. Besides, he was a highly talented networker. He spent some of the last years of his life in luxury exile in Linz, before dying in Trieste. In flashbacks the old man is haunted by his crimes. The previously so eloquent demagogue lapses more and more into silence. In a nearly frightening way actor Harald Heinz succeeded in dissecting the character as he develops from an evil despot into an almost pitiable old man. Franz Hummel's music is brittle and clear-cut. The stage direction and choreography of Susan Oswell creates a balance between dynamic mass scenes and intimate scenes. "Ensemble 09" led by Alexei Kornienko was in control of the music – from waltz and tango to rhythmic frenzy. Students and graduates of the Anton Bruckner Private University Linz excelled as a choir and dance group. www.linz09.at, www.posthof.at ■

Austrian Cross of Honour for Science and Art to Elazar Benyoëtz

Israeli writer Elazar Benyoëtz was awarded the Austrian Cross of Honour for Science and Art, First Class, “for his excellent contributions to poetry and language” by Minister Claudia Schmied at a ceremony staged by the Federal Ministry of Education, Art and Culture on 13 January 2009. Schmied praised him as “one of the most important language artists between the languages. To conquer new territories is your guiding principle“. Robert Menasse said in a very personal presentation speech: “Read him and you will pause for a second and discover abysses and chasms in yourself“. In his thank-you statement the award winner asked: “How much does one have to have forgotten to be able to remember?“

Elazar Benyoëtz was born as Paul Koppel in Wiener Neustadt (Lower Austria) in 1937 and has lived in Jerusalem since 1939. In 1959 he passed the rabbi examination: the name Ben-yo-etz means “son of an advisor“. During a stay in Berlin he founded the Bibliographia Judaica. He wrote his first poetry volumes in Hebrew, since the 1960s he has published numerous volumes of essays, poetry and aphorisms in German language. Besides religious subjects, his books often revolve around language itself. Benyoëtz, who is considered one of the most important German-language aphorists, won numerous awards, e.g. the German Federal Cross for Meritorious Service or the Joseph Breitbach Prize of the Academy of Science and Literature in Mainz. Since 2003 he has been a corresponding member of the German Academy for Language and Poetry in Darmstadt. Recently his book “Die Eselin Bileams und Kohélet's Hund“ (Baalám's Donkey and Kohélet's Dog”) was published by Hanser. ■

Susanne Wenger – she built bridges across continents and cultures

Austrian artist Susanne Wenger, who is famed as the godmother of modern art in Nigeria, died aged 93 where she chose to live: Oshogbo. Wenger was born in Graz in 1915 and studied in Vienna, e.g. with Arnold Boeckl. In the nights of bombing of WWII. she made hyper-realistic drawings. After 1945 she published in the art magazine of Otto Basil “Der Plan“. For the first issue of the Communist children's publication

“Unsere Zeitung“ she created the irritating cover depicting the horror experienced by children during the war. In 1947 she became a co-founder of the Vienna “Art – Club“, where the representatives of modern art gathered. In 1949 she met her first husband, linguist Ulli Beier in Paris, who – many years later – was to head the Iwalewa House in Bayreuth, one of the leading centres for modern African art and culture in Germany.

In 1950 she developed severe tuberculosis in Nigeria. No doctor was able to help the foreign artist, only a babalao, a traditional healer of the Yoruba people. Today the Yoruba are one of Africa's largest ethnic groups, with a population of more than 30 million people and a culture of some millenniums.

After her recovery, Wenger became immersed in the mystical world of the Yoruba, created a novel, spiritual art. Her towering sculptures in “Osun Grove“ even became UNESCO world heritage in 2005. Susanne Wenger adopted more than two dozens of children and established a Nigerian artists' colony in Oshogbo. She advised young artists to be inspired by trees, which were talking to the people. Over the years she became a high priestess of the Yoruba religion. She considered a simple, honest, humble and tranquil life essential and tried to pass this message on. According to her, this was the real art. ■

“Pelléas et Mélisande“ in Vienna

Claude Debussy's lyrical drama “Pelléas et Mélisande“ of the year 1902 was staged at Theater an der Wien. The production stood out for its high musical standards and sober stage setting, giving an optimal visual interpretation of the mysterious, asphyxiating opera plot.

Together with Radio-Symphonieorchester, Bertrand de Billy was responsible for the ephemeral and differentiated musical interpretation, the singers gave a convincing and moving performance in the ambience created by director Laurent Pelly – above all Natalie Dessay (Mélisande), Stéphane Degout (Pelléas), Laurent Naouri (Golaud) and Philip Ens (Arkel). On show until 25 January 2009: www.theater-wien.at ■

Standardised A-levels: June 2014

According to Minister for Education Claudia Schmied, Austrian grammar school pupils are to take “standardised, competence-oriented A-level exams” as from June 2014. ■

First “Youth Olympic Winter Games“ to be held in Innsbruck in 2012

The host city agreement for the first winter events of the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) was signed in Innsbruck on 15 January 2009. In 2012 about 1,000 young people are expected to participate in these games of the Olympic movement. At the contract signing with Leo Wallner, President of the Austrian Olympic Committee, and Innsbruck's Mayor Hilde Zach, IOC President Jaques Rogge praised the quality of the application of the Tyrolian capital. “I am pleased that Olympia will be a guest in Innsbruck for the third time“, Rogge said, alluding to the winter games in 1964 and 1976. “The city knows how to organise large-scale sports events. Innsbruck has the infrastructure and the city loves sport“, he explained. However, the YOG held for the age group 14 to 18 years will not focus on elitist record achievements. What was important “were education and the conveyance of Olympic ideals such as fair play, healthy life and no doping“. The World Youth Games 2012 are to be dominated by fun, the educational and cultural programme would be in the foreground. Not without pride ÖOC President Wallner said: “An overwhelming majority of the IOC members, i.e. 85 percent, voted in favour of Innsbruck and Austria“. ■

“The Paper Man” died 70 years ago

On 23 January 1939 Matthias Sindelar was found dead with his girlfriend Camilla Castagnola in her flat in Annagasse in Vienna's historic centre. According to the police report the reason for their death was “smoke intoxication” due of a defective heater. But many Viennese – among them emigrated Jewish author Friedrich Torberg in his ballade “To the death of a football player“ – were of the opinion that the real reason was double suicide due to political hopelessness. The slender fair-haired man and football star of the “Wunderteam“ (“Miracle Team”) had led the Austrian national team as its skipper against the Germans for the last time in April 1938 (2:0, a goal by Sindelar). He detested the “restructuring of the sports sector in a National Socialist spirit”. The elegant kicker famous for his playing technique “light as paper” repeatedly resisted integration into the “overall German” team. He did not even reach the age of 36 years. ■

NADA: first blood tests

On 10 January 2009 the national anti-doping agency (Anti-Doping Agentur Austria GmbH/NADA) conducted the first blood tests on Austrian athletes. For these doping checks, which should have been introduced a long time ago to ensure a credible anti-doping combat, NADA had to train doctors. Some forbidden substances can be detected only in blood.

As NADA informed, members of the triathlon leagues A and B were tested during a training camp in Ramsau am Dachstein (Styria). Six athletes had blood taken for checks - this “premiere” caused some astonishment. Ten athletes had to give urine samples. All samples were sent to the test laboratory in Seibersdorf (Lower Austria). According to NADA, there they are examined “comprehensively”. ■

Less taxes for amateur clubs

Austrian amateur sport is to be put on safer ground in tax matters. A working group for “tax issues in sports“ was initiated by then Secretary of State for Sport and incumbent Minister of Finance Reinhold Lopatka and set up within the Ministry of Finance in spring 2008. In cooperation with the Austrian Football Federation (Österreichischer Fußball Bund/ÖFB), it prepared a concept stating that non-profit sports clubs may make cost refunds of a maximum of 540 euros per month and person, without being liable to pay taxes and social insurance contributions. These cost refunds are expenses for players, trainers, masseurs or referees.

“The aim of introducing this lump-sum rule is to ease the financial strain on clubs, above all in youth work“, Lopatka explained, referring to the about 220,000 children and young people registered with the ÖFB.

Lopatka does no longer hold the position of a Secretary of State for Sport – with the entry into force of the Act on Federal Ministries the competence for sports was transferred to the Ministry of Defence headed by Minister Norbert Darabos – but remains responsible for sport within the co-governing Austrian People's Party (ÖVP). Issues regarding tax exemptions for amateur associations are to be addressed in the context of the tax reform. ■