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Income Report of the Court of Auditors: firm response by politics

Every two years the Court of Auditors assesses the income of the Austrians by working out the median salary earned in the most important sectors. All data refer to the median gross income per year, i.e. 50% of the employees earn more, 50% less.

The Court of Auditors published its latest Income Report on 29 December 2008. Conclusion: The nominal median income has increased moderately since 1998. While the median of the gross annual incomes was 19,430 euros in 1998, it stood at 22,815 euros in 2007. The average increase per year was only 1.8%. In this period women's median income rose from 14,111 to 16,748 euros, corresponding to an average plus of 1.9% per year. The median income of men grew by 2.1% - from 23,365 to 28,226 euros - in the same period. While the median of women's gross annual income had been 60.4 % of men's median income in 1998, it was only 59.3% in 2007.

A comparison of inflation-adjusted gross annual incomes between 1998 and 2007 shows that women's salaries increased by 1% and those of men by 2%.

Women are disadvantaged in all sectors. In the private sector female white-collar workers earn 49% and female blue-collar workers merely 44% of men's median income. In the public sector female civil servants are paid 98% and contract employees 78% of men's salaries. The gap is partly due to part-time work but even if only all-year-round full-time employees are compared, the median income of women is only 78% of that of men. In such a comparison female white-collar workers achieve 64%, female blue-collar workers 67%, female civil servants 98% and female contract staff 91% of the salaries of their male counterparts.

In Austria women are overrepresented in service and auxiliary occupations and consequentially in badly paid jobs. In these occupational groups they work part-time at above-average rates, which has an additional negative effect on their income situation. 89% of all those working throughout the year are women, 39% of all working women hold part-time contracts - compared to only 4% of the men.

Pensions also reflect the income gap between men and women. Men's annual average pension amounts to 20,970 euros, while women receive only 11,859 euros.

Minister for Women's Affairs Gabriele Heinisch-Hosek reacted promptly to the income gap between women and men: "In the past ten years 16.8% more women were employed. If these women work in low-income sectors, the gap is widening. We have to qualify and further train women. In Austria every sixth working woman has completed only compulsory education. This is something we have to change" (interview with the daily "Kurier" on 31 December 2008). She informed that the National Action Plan for Equality of Women in the Labour Market provided for a qualification campaign for women. Especially in economically difficult times it was imperative to invest in education and training. The government programme laid down that 50% of the funds for active labour market policy were to be allocated to women. A major impetus would also be given by the second economic stimulus package as the additional 75 million euros earmarked for labour market policy measures would be targeted at women. Moreover, the income-adjusted childcare allowance and the "father's month" had to be implemented quickly. Whether it was possible to introduce equality criteria for the awarding of public contracts would be examined for EU conformity.

Minister for Social Affairs Rudolf Hundstorfer also announced a qualification campaign for women. Under the regional qualification programme for skilled labour, more support would be granted to women in 2009 - 60% of a total 5,000 participants will be women. In addition, the Minister for Social Affairs highlighted the programme "FIT - Women in Technology". Its aim is to encourage women to take on technical jobs. It was also important to motivate girls and women to become active in fields that were "not typically female" as especially the jobs chosen most frequently by women were paid very badly. Measures mentioned by the Minister were mentoring projects and so-called "Girls' Days", but in particular awareness campaigns at school.

After presentation of the Income Report, the Chamber of Labour (AK), Caritas and the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) called for the quick implementation of the guaranteed minimum income, which had so far been prevented by a veto of Carinthia. Minister for Social Affairs Hundstorfer is expected to discuss this issue with Carinthia's Governor Gerhard Dörfler in the near future. ■

Fischer intensifies relations with Israel and the Palestinians

Federal President Heinz Fischer paid an official visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories from 15 to 18 December 2008 (see also "News from Austria", No. 24/08).

During his state visit President Fischer said that in Austria the awareness of Holocaust issues had risen over the past ten years. Since the mid 1990s, the right measures had been taken by the government. In a meeting with Holocaust survivors living in Israel Fischer rejected concerns about the resurgence of Nazi ideas in Austria in the wake of the upswing of right-wing parties. He was proud that by voting for him the Austrians had elected a declared anti-fascist as their head of state. Fischer admitted that after World War II, Austria had for a long time found it difficult to confront its past and to admit its guilt. However, today all anti-Semitic remarks would provoke "determined reactions of a large majority that was not willing to accept them".

The Federal President also underlined the good relations between Austria and Israel. Just like the entire EU, Austria defended Israel's right to exist vis-à-vis all those that wanted to deny this right to the Jewish state.

In his thank-you statement at the presentation of a honorary doctorate at the University of Tel Aviv, Fischer referred to the 90th anniversary of the foundation of the Republic of Austria. In this context, the President underlined the shared responsibility of the Austrians for the NS crimes, but also reminded of the Austrian resistance fighters. Moreover, the Federal President reiterated on this occasion that contemporary Austria was fundamentally different from that of the year 1918.

At the beginning of his state visit, Fischer had been received with military honours in the residence of his Israeli counterpart Shimon Peres in Jerusalem. In his very friendly welcome statement Peres reminded of the fact that he and Fischer came from a Social Democratic background and were committed to common values. The Israeli President also praised the outstanding support Austria had lent under Bruno Kreisky to facilitate the emigration of Jews from the former USSR to Israel. Peres also pointed out that Fischer was very familiar with Israel and had worked at a kibbutz in 1963. Fischer replied that he had always observed the development in Israel very attentively. He also reminded of the tragic history the two countries shared. It was

"important to speak clearly and honestly about what had happened".

In view of the difficult problems in the Middle East, President Fischer stated that Peres had contributed to clarity, understanding and progress. He had been very pleased when Peres – then Israeli Foreign Minister – had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. He hoped that this state visit would help to intensify the positive relations between the countries.

Federal President Fischer also paid a visit to the West Bank. He was received with military honours in Ramallah by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Before Fischer had laid a wreath at the grave of Abbas' predecessor Yasser Arafat. The development of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, the conflict between Fatah and Hamas as well as the situation in the Gaza Strip were discussed at the meeting at the President's seat, the Mukataa. Before the meeting, Fischer had held talks with Palestinian chief negotiator Ahmed Korei. He praised Austria's longstanding support for the concerns of the Palestinians. On behalf of Austria and the entire EU, the Federal Present expressed the wish that a just and fair solution would be reached by negotiations. The problems were complex and not easy to solve, Fischer admitted. The Palestinian side had to clearly demonstrate "a common will and a common position".

Fischer ended his official trip with a visit to the Austrian Hospice in Jerusalem.

The Hospice offering accommodation for pilgrims was erected in the style of the sumptuous buildings along Vienna's avenue "Ringstraße" in Via Dolorosa and opened in 1863. It was used as a hospital from 1948 to 1985 and was re-opened in 1988 as a guesthouse and centre for dialogue and culture of the Austrian Bishop's Conference. The Austrian Hospice – headed by the priest Rector Markus Bugnyar from Eisenstadt since 2004 – is the oldest existing pilgrims' centre in the Holy Land.

The reception staged for the President was attended inter alia by Ministers Claudia Schmied and Norbert Darabos, Burgenland's Governor Hans Niessl, high-ranking Church dignitaries as well as the Austrian UN Force Commander on the Golan Heights, Wolfgang Jilke.

Bugnyar stressed the mediation efforts of the Austrian Catholics in the Holy Land, in particular those of the nuns, whose commitment to people with highly severe disabilities, to nursing care of children and to their work for the elderly was invaluable. ■

Investing and saving: economic stimulus package II adopted

On 23 December 2008 the federal government adopted the economic stimulus package II worth almost 2 billion euros to revive the economy and to promote employment. It includes infrastructure investments, reducing-balance depreciation and a compulsory nursery year. Chancellor Werner Faymann and his Vice-Chancellor and Finance Minister Josef Pröll explained that no other measures were being planned by the coalition government but that those adopted should become effective. Faymann also stressed “that the opportunity should not be missed to invest now 2% of the gross domestic product (GDP) in a targeted and practicable way; at the same time belt-tightening was required to gather the strength for taking new measures, if necessary“. Faymann described this “mixture between feasible investments and measures paralleled by tax relief” as the “right approach”. A working group composed not only of the Federal Chancellor and the Vice-Chancellor but also two Governors and the President of the Court of Auditors would become active still in January 2009.

The planned summit meeting on the car industry will take place on 8 January 2009. Problems of the car components industry and models such as short-time work will be discussed.

With a total of 5.7 billion euros or 2% of the GDP (including the economic stimulus packages I and II as well as the tax reform) Austria’s measures to revive the economy exceeded the European goal of 1.5% of the GDP, Vice-Chancellor Pröll informed. Thanks to the economic stimulus packages and the tax reform, growth of 0.75% was expected for 2009. In his capacity as Minister of Finance, Pröll also announced that in the budget negotiations he would demand “absolute discipline” in public administration from the individual ministries. He would set restrictive standards to achieve savings in administration. After a ban on new recruitment in the public sector up to the adoption of the next budget had been agreed on in the latest Council of Ministers, now the possibility was considered of filling only every second budgetary post becoming vacant after that. The budget negotiations with the individual ministries will start in February.

Chancellor Faymann mentioned that the economic stimulus package II, which was a vital contribution to tackle the economic crisis, had double the volume of package I. ■

Ministry of Economic Affairs and BIG support construction industry

By launching an investment campaign in public surface construction, the government gives priority to building measures in the framework of the economic stimulus package II. As Minister for Economic Affairs Reinhold Mitterlehner stated at a press conference on 30 December 2008, which he held jointly with the Managing Director of the Federal Real Estate Agency (Bundesimmobilien-gesellschaft/BIG), Wolfgang Gleissner, the measures aimed at safeguarding “jobs in the construction sector”. In the past BIG has been responsible for 8,000 to 10,000 jobs annually in building companies and construction-related trade. Now an additional 3,000 to 4,000 jobs per year are to be safeguarded. ■

Austria-Japan Year 2009

This year Austria and Japan celebrate 140 years of diplomatic relations. In summer 2006 then Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel and Japan’s Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi decided to stage anniversary celebrations. Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger stated the anniversary year would be celebrated in Japan and Austria with a view “to intensifying the close and traditionally good friendship between the two countries“. The anniversary will be marked by a comprehensive programme for the whole year. The main responsibility for the “Austria-Japan Year 2009“ rests with the foreign ministries in Vienna and Tokyo. The manifold relations do not only cover the wide spectrum of culture and cultural heritage but also include strong economic ties as well as cooperation in youth exchange, tourism, technology and research. A priority is to intensify cooperation in environmental and climate protection. So far Austria has been perceived by a wide public in Japan as a beautiful country of classical arts and winter sports. Now Austria is to be presented to Japan not only as a traditional but also as an innovative country in more than 100 projects. During the Tokyo Design Week in October modern design from Austria will for example be showcased. Gustav Peichl will curate an exhibition of Austrian architecture. The Vienna Museum of Art History will present “Treasures of the Hapsburgs“ at the National Arts Center in Tokyo from September to November 2009. www.austria-japan2009 ■

The world of music commemorates the 200th anniversary of Joseph Haydn's death

On 31 May 2009 the 200th anniversary of the death of Joseph Haydn will be commemorated. In 1809 Joseph Haydn, who is considered by many musicians, music researchers and music lovers the most important and relatively most unknown composer of Western culture, died aged 77 in Gumpendorf, then a suburb of Vienna. Coming from a humble background in Rohrau (Lower Austria), Haydn became Kapellmeister to the Esterházy family residing in Eisenstadt (in Burgenland since 1921) and Esterháza (Fertőd/Hungary) from 1766 to 1790. In old age he had won renown as Europe's most famous composer. Haydn further developed in a highly original way contrapuntal music into a great diversity of classical forms, which finally resulted in a "sonata form" becoming the standard musical form in the 19th century as well as the symphony. The development is reflected in 52 piano sonatas, 83 string quartets, in which Haydn for the first time achieved absolute equality among the four performing instruments – Opus 33, the so-called "Russian Quartets" were greatly admired by his 24-year younger friend Wolfgang Amadé Mozart – , 24 piano and organ concerts and more than 100 symphonies. Until very old age Haydn took boundless joy in experimenting – leading not only to pioneering composition techniques but also stunning the audience with witty and playful approaches.

An exquisite show presenting manuscripts, books and letters is still running at the National Library up to 1 February 2009. It traces important stages in Haydn's work - the triumphs of his stays in London (1790 to 1792 and 1794 to 1795), the great masses as well as the popularity of the Emperor's Hymn "God Save" (1797), a true "hymn of the people", which Haydn created to raise patriotic awareness during the Napoleonic Wars. The overwhelming success of the oratories "The Creation" (1798) and "The Seasons" (1801) are the highlights in the oeuvre of this unique artist, about whom Mozart once said: "Nobody can do everything – tease and shock, make you smile and touch your soul, and all of that so perfectly as Haydn". He was clearly aware of the merits of living a secluded life: "I was completely secluded from the world, nobody was nearby who could distract me or confuse me about myself, and in this way I became original".

The New Year's Concert of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra ushered in the forthcoming celebrations of the genius. Two of the three ballet scenes were filmed on original locations in Eisenstadt. Nikolaus Harnoncourt will conduct Concentus Musicus presenting the four symphonies of the key creative periods of Haydn at Esterházy Palace on 31 March 2009. It goes without saying that this year all 107 symphonies will be performed "by the best ensembles and conductors of the world who really have something to say about Haydn", as Walter Reicher, artistic manager of the Haydn Year in Burgenland, put it. The focus will be on Haydn's religious work in Eisenstadt during Eastern – from 9 to 13 April 2009. The programme includes the already traditional performance of the "Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross" at Bergkirche (Mountain Church), where the composer's remains were laid to rest in a tomb of honour donated by the Esterházy family. This work will also be interpreted by the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra led by Riccardo Muti at Vienna's Musikverein on 4 April 2009. A festival opening on 30 April 2009 will be devoted to the trio, a genre highly appreciated by Haydn. 18 commissioned works "DedicatedToHaydn" will receive their world premiers until 3 May 2009. In these works six Austrian and twelve international composers dedicate a piano trio to the admired old master of the Vienna classical period of music.

On 31 May 2009 the "World Creation Day" will be celebrated in large parts of the world. The Austro-Hungarian Haydn Philharmonic Orchestra under Adam Fischer will interpret the oratory "The Creation" in Eisenstadt and at Esterháza Palace. Lorin Maazel will conduct it in New York, other concerts are to be held in Tokyo, Sydney, Athens, London, Boston and San Francisco. The exhibition "Haydn goes international" will tour more than 30 countries. The International Haydn Days in Eisenstadt – one of Europe's most important classical music festivals – are extended, running from 9 to 27 September 2009. This year's motto is "Haydn, London, Paris". The performing artists include the English Chamber Orchestra led by Sir Colin Davis, the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra conducted by Ton Koopman, the Orchestra Of The 18th Century under Frans Brüggen, as well as Jordi Savall and Christophe Rousset.

The anniversary exhibition "The Phenomenon Joseph Haydn" will be shown at four venues in Eisenstadt, e.g. Esterházy Palace and the

Diocesan Museum. It gives insight into Haydn's artistic and private life. The exhibits are mainly loans from museums in Hungary, e.g. the Museum of Applied Arts, the Museum of Fine Arts, the Hungarian National Museum, the State Archives, the National Library and the District Archives of Győr-Moson-Sopron.

The Haydn House in Gumpendorf, Vienna, where the composer spent the last 12 years of his life, opens a completely revamped permanent exhibition on 29 January 2009, with valuable paintings, first editions and various documents, including his will. The renovation of Haydn's house in Eisenstadt – with the recently uncovered original wall paintings – will also be completed in late January. Some rooms will present reconstructed historical interiors and contemporary furniture. In Haydn's birth house in Rohrau and in Harrach Palace concerts will be performed in the framework of the Haydn Days in late June. The Grafenegg Music Festival, the Melk Baroque Festival and the "Allegro Vivo" Festival in Waldviertel (all of them in Lower Austria) will also be under the spell of Haydn. At the House of Music a special room is devoted to "Papa Haydn", as Mozart called him affectionately. The Austrian Mint (Münze Österreich) will feature the genius on a new five-euro silver coin.

The Vienna Mozart House also pays tribute to Haydn with special exhibitions, concert series and a symposium. From 23 January to 3 May 2009 valuable autographs from the Vienna Library in the City Hall are shown under the title "Chi vive amante ... - I know that he who lives as a lover is delirious". Among them is the final copy of the score of the aria "Chi vive amante so che delira", which Haydn composed for a performance of Francesco Bianchi's opera "Alessandro nell'Indie" at Esterházy Palace in 1787. The singer of the world premiere was the very young South Italian Luigia Polzelli, who had a close relationship with the married composer over many years and probably even had a son with him. The aria was composed in the same year as Mozart's "Don Giovanni" and is now presented in the musical context of Mozart and other composers of the era. The spotlight is turned on Mozart already during the Mozart Week in Salzburg from 23 January to 1 February 2009. Christof Loy's sensational production of the opera "Armida" of 2007 will reappear on the programme of the Salzburg Festival from 25 July to 30 August 2009. The concert programme of the Festival also features Haydn. The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra under Sir

Simon Rattle interprets "The Seasons", the Musiciens du Louvre bring their own Haydn cycle.

The Vienna Chamber Opera (Wiener Kammeroper) offers the ideal setting for the chamber music ambience of Haydn operas, presenting "Le pescatrici" and "Acide e Galatea". Vienna Konzerthaus presents several Haydn cycles, e.g. concerts with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra and with soloists such as pianist Rudolf Buchbinder and Stefan Vladar. Musikverein will host performances of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, Concentus Musicus and Artis Quartet.

Otto Brusatti, a programme moderator of the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF) and a music researcher, wrote in the article titled "The pop star from Rohrau" (in the daily "Die Presse" on 27 December 2008) that in ten years "Haydn Land" – the Austrian-Hungarian-Slovakian region with Lake Neusiedl in its centre – will "probably have become so 'in' like Tuscany or the Spanish coast ten or 20 years ago". Hence, the great European composer is still playing a pioneering role in today's economic and cultural-political cross-border cooperation. Haydn will also be celebrated in Sopron, a Hungarian town regularly visited by him. One of his works has been selected for the Concert for Europe celebrating "20 years of open borders" on 19 August 2009.

Haydn even haunts the world of comedy. The play "Der Kopf des Joseph Haydn" ("The head of Joseph Haydn") by Michael Korth will receive its international premiere at Schlossspiele Kobersdorf, successfully directed by actor and crowd pleaser Wolfgang Böck. It explores Haydn's obviously difficult love life with an unloved spouse and intrigues at the princely court.

Through music Haydn probably also managed to escape reality. The Jennersdorf Festival Summer at Tabor Palace (southern Burgenland) stages an open-air performance of the opera "The World on the Moon". The piece based on Carlo Goldoni's work was translated and produced by Dominik Wilgenbus. The original version "Il mondo della luna" will be premiered at Theater an der Wien on 7 December 2009, marking the end of the Haydn Year. Director is Tobias Moretti. Nikolaus Harnoncourt conducts Concentus Musicus, just like at the opening of the Haydn Year 2009. www.haydn2009.net; www.haydnfestival.at; www.schloss-esterhazy.at; www.haydn-gesellschaft.at; www.jopera.at; www.mozarthausvienna.at; www.theater-wien.at; www.kobersdorf.at; www.mozarteum.at ■

President Fischer opens European Capital of Culture "Linz 2009"

On New Year's Eve President Heinz Fischer officially opened "Linz 2009 – European Capital of Culture" at Bruckner House. In his serious speech Fischer said that the new year was going to be difficult. But the Austrians were not only capable of coping with difficult situations but also making the impossible possible. Fischer also drew attention to the fact that in 2009 the 20th anniversary of fundamental transformations would be commemorated. The year 1989 saw the "Velvet Revolution" in the former CSFR, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the cutting through the Iron Curtain on the Hungarian border. All this had been a prerequisite for creating the Europe of today. The European project managed to agree on many things, even on two capitals of culture. Besides Linz, also Vilnius (Lithuania) was European Capital of Culture, as Fischer underlined several times. And of course the President paid tribute to the capital of Upper Austria. The city had worked hard to become European Capital of Culture. The steel centre on the Danube river had also become a cultural centre, with a highly interesting programme.

Shortly after the turn of the year, the new metropolis situated on the banks of the river Danube experienced a first highlight: the "Rocket Symphony", which had attracted a crowd of 130,000 people despite the biting cold. A choir consisting of several hundreds of singers from Linz and surroundings, supported by 16 soloists of the professional choir "The Shout" entered into a dialogue with fireworks rockets shooting into the sky. The choir sang a mixture of gospels, chorales and Asian-inspired music. The collage of vivid, flashy and cracking images of the pyrotechnicians finally prevailed. It was fascinating to see how the images were reflected in the Danube, while green and yellow lights were floating down the river. This work had been composed by Orlando Gough (GB), who also had orchestrated the closing ceremony of the European Capital of Culture 2008 Stavanger (Norway). In Linz he cooperated with Tom Ryser. Together they had produced "Singing River" for the re-opening of the Royal Festival Hall in London in 2007.

The opening events lasted until 2 January. In the harbour hall erected specifically for Linz09 the play "Buch der Unruhe" ("Book of Disquiet") – based on the prose work by legendary Portuguese author Fernando Pessoa – was premiered, starring

Klaus Maria Brandauer. At the Lentos Museum the art exhibition "Best of Austria" was opened – with contributions from museums and collections from all over Austria. Moreover, the enlarged museum of the future "Ars Electronica Center" opened its doors.

For Linz09 220 projects have been planned, with a total budget of more than 68 million euros. Through its projects the city allows the public to immerse itself in its scintillating ambience: Linz Welcome, Linz Capital, Linz Power, Linz Travel Linz World, Linz Memory, Linz Knowledge, Linz Lust, Linz Holidays and Linz Dream are the main themes. Hence, not only subjects like history, urban development and the every-day life of Linz are addressed but also European and international topics. The exhibition "Das grüne Band Europas" ("Europe's Green Belt") presents the unique ecosystem between wilderness and cultural landscape along the former Iron Curtain. Besides the presentation of this international nature conservation project in the Linz Palace Museum (4 July 2009 to 8 January 2010), the question will also be explored in what direction the border regions in the heart of Europe could develop in the future. At the international culture festival "Extra Europe" (19 March to 2 May 2009), the European Capital of Culture focuses on three European countries outside the EU: Norway, Switzerland and Turkey. Apart from analysing their reasons for not being EU members, the question about Europe's true "cultural identity" is raised. The contribution on Norway concentrates on equality; multilingualism and multiculturalism are the topics of Switzerland, while the section on Turkey is devoted to the exchange between the Ottoman Empire and Europe. www.linz09.at; www.linz.at/tourismus ■

Vienna to become the international centre of Holocaust research

Before Christmas the City of Vienna, which has always advocated a Simon Wiesenthal Institute in Vienna, made available the necessary financial funds. The Municipal Council agreed to provide a multi-annual subsidy to the association "Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies". The City of Vienna will grant the association 1.3 million euros up to 2011 for establishing the Institute. Vienna is to become a leading research location for all topics concerning anti-Semitism, racism and the Holocaust. As from 2012 onwards, the Institute will be accommodated in Palais Strozzi (8th district of Vienna). ■

Plan for three-country-ski world champs received enthusiastically

The idea of Carinthian Governor Gerhard Dörfler to file a joint application for hosting a three-country ski world championship “senza confini” was welcomed enthusiastically and met with great media interest in Kranjska Gora (Slovenia) on 29 December 2009. Dörfler, who succeeded to deceased Jörg Haider, and the mayors of the potential three venues Bad Kleinkirchheim (Carinthia/Austria), Tarvisio (Friaul/Italy) and Kranjska Gora (Gorenjska/Slovenia) were very optimistic that they would be able to realise this initiative after their summit meeting. They expect great opportunities to arise not only for their places but the entire Alpine-Adriatic region. At the press conference skiing legends Franz Klammer, Christian Mayer (Austria) and Jure Košir (Slovenia) stated that they would act as “ambassadors” and lend their full support to the three-country ski world championship.

“Three regions, three venues, one idea and one goal”, Dörfler stressed the motto of the joint application, which was based on the idea of the Olympic application “senza confini”. He underlined that the three places were top World Cup venues with optimal infrastructure and a lot of experience. In addition, they were geographically close. According to the Governor, also the International Ski Federation (FIS) had shown great interest in such a cross-border mass sports event. President of the Austrian Ski Association (ÖSV) Peter Schröcksnadel had supported the project in a written statement. In a next step the initiative would be presented in Bad Kleinkirchheim as well as at the World Cup races in Tarvisio and Kranjska Gora. Furthermore, concrete talks would be held with the competent FIS officials. The joint application would be submitted in 2010. The costs as well as the events should be shared fairly among the three. ■

Not an easy situation for NADA

In the last few years Austrian athletes, but also coaches and officials had been suspected of doping offences, and partly they were also found guilty, such as in the spectacular case of cyclist and third in the Tour de France Bernhard Kohl. As a result, the combat against doping has been intensified in Austria since summer 2008. This policy is to be continued in 2009. The National

Anti-Doping Agentur Austria GmbH (NADA), founded in August 2008, has a budget of 1.2 million euros. With this budget it can afford 1,400 doping tests, including about 100 blood tests. Up to 70% of all checks are to be conducted “out of competition”.

The budget of NADA Austria is relatively small compared to the other European agencies. As NADA Director Andreas Schwab explained, the budget determined the quantity and quality of checks and analytical techniques. And this was also true for information and prevention. By stepping up financial resources (compared to the level of funds available to the predecessor organisation ÖADC), a first step had been made towards an improvement. But: “It would be desirable if we could conduct considerably more checks and test all samples for many or all banned substances”. For comparison: Switzerland has a budget of 3.8 million Swiss francs (2.43 million euros), Denmark has 2 million euros and eight employees, Sweden 3 million euros and 15 employees and Finland 2.5 million euros and eight employees. NADA Austria has four and a half employees and will be joined by a new clerical staff member this year. The Swiss anti-doping agency also faces problems, it had hoped for an additional million Swiss francs from the federal government budget but Parliament voted against it. This means that the Swiss will not perform any blood tests in 2009, which are however an important element in the combat against doping, even if 95% of the forbidden substances can still be found in urine. Although NADA Austria has only about half of the money of its Swiss counterpart, blood tests will form part of the programme in 2009. “5 to 8% of all tests will be blood tests, and comparable percentages are recorded at international level,” Schwab explained. With the aid of the Doping Selection Committee the sports were determined which are most prone to doping cheats and had to be checked more strictly. This selection had been coordinated with Germany and Switzerland and would be presented to the public only at a later date. The testing pools had been determined also in coordination with the neighbouring countries and in accordance with the Code of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), e.g. for the cadre of elite athletes or for national teams. NADA intensified also cooperation with the 160 Austrian sports schools. www.nada.at/ ■