

Editorial close: 14 December 2009

No 24/09

CONTENTS

HOME AFFAIRS

Federal Chancellor Faymann: working together for Austria
National Council: numerous resolutions before the end of the year
Council of Ministers approved extension of Federal Army mission
0.9% for public sector staff

EUROPE ■ INTERNATIONAL

Israel's Minister of Defence Barak pays official visit to Vienna
Federal Chancellor Faymann at EU summit in Brussels
Federal Chancellor Faymann met with Serbian President Tadic
Positive results of Austria's UN Security Council Chair

ECONOMY

Hypo Alpe Adria nationalised, savings deposits secure
Central Europe's first natural gas exchange in Vienna
OeBN revises GDP forecast

CULTURE ■ MEDIA ■ SCIENCE

Linz 09: Bert Brecht's "Jungle of Cities" at Landestheater
Haydn Jahr 09: "Il mondo della luna" at Theater an der Wien
Josef Haydn stimulates tourism
StifterHaus in Linz: Peter Handke
On the death of Alfred Hrdlicka
The Children of Maison d'Izieu

SPORTS POLICY

One year of government: Minister of Sport presents positive results
Darabos: "Rogan made comeback as a very great athlete!"

**The editorial team wishes all loyal readers
a peaceful, happy New Year 2010!**

IMPRINT

Owner (publisher) and producer: Federal Chancellery, Federal Press Service. A-1014 Vienna, Ballhausplatz 1.
Editor: Dr. Franz Putz, tel. ++43/1/53115-2579, fax ++43/1/53115-4274, e-mail: franz.putz@bka.gv.at.
Dispatch: Division VII/2, Ms. Irene Bucher, tel. ++43/1/53115-2958, fax ++43/1/53115-2880, e-mail: irene.bucher@bka.gv.at.
Website: <http://www.bundestkanzleramt.at>. Excerpts from this text may be reprinted. Published by the Federal Press Service – Vienna.

Federal Chancellor Faymann: working together for Austria

On 2 December 2009 Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann presented a five-point programme for Austria in the Grand Hall of Ceremonies of Vienna's Hofburg. His speech marking the first anniversary of the swearing-in of the federal government was under the motto "Together for Austria", it recalled important events of the past and gave an overview of the tasks ahead.

He was "proud" of being able to live in a country where "despite all differences in opinion, agreement and not disagreement was sought", stressed Faymann. It was crucial "to work together for Austria and to respond jointly to the concerns and needs of the people". The five-point programme contained concrete measures for the labour market, education, the environment, research, nursing care and healthcare as well as the consolidation of public finances. The focus was on the interests of employees and employers.

Faymann highlighted the "2010 Labour Market and Qualification Package", which has been prepared recently to continue stabilising the labour market. It encompasses qualification and advanced training programmes for unemployed people and labour market integration subsidies for young people with completed education/training. Regarding education, Faymann pled for doubling the number of New Middle Schools and a substantial increase in day-school places – 200,000 should become available by 2018.

To make research promotion measures more effective, to enhance Austria's positioning as an international research location as well as to promote new technologies, notably in the environmental sector, Faymann proposed a simplification of research tax incentives. A general 12%-premium for the research and development expenses of enterprises was planned, providing fiscal support even in years without profits.

An "Intergenerational Fund" was to be set up for nursing care/healthcare, childcare and the school system; 2 billion euro would be allocated to it. According to Faymann, the Fund would create up to 50,000 new jobs. It would be financed from the hospital budget and a financial transactions tax.

To consolidate the public finances, it was also vital to implement the administrative reform quickly, which could entail cost-savings of up to 3.5 billion euro, emphasised Faymann. ■

National Council: numerous resolutions before the end of the year

In its two last regular sessions of this year on 10/11 December 2009, the National Council completed a marathon programme, adopting various resolutions, e.g. the registered partnership for same-sex couples, a children's legal advisor in maintenance and divorce cases, information of the victims of violence and sexual offences (if perpetrators are released from prison), wage increase (by 0.9 to 1.2%) for public sector staff as well as a pension increase in 2010 (1.5% plus a one-time bonus for lower pensions), stricter anti-doping rules (intentional doping punishable as fraud under criminal law) as well as the extension of the bank aid package (up to the end of 2010).

The Members of Parliament voted unanimously in favour of the second phase of the reform of the budget law. The amended law introduces new budgeting rules as from 2013. Its aim is to ensure more transparency in public finances and to give the ministries more discretion in using their funds. Multi-annual expenditure caps, so-called "global budgets", will allow a more flexible use of the funds. Parliament will receive a special budget department to facilitate checks. ■

Council of Ministers approved extension of Federal Army mission

On 9 December 2009, the Council of Ministers approved the extension of the Federal Army's Border Control Assistance Mission on the eastern borders of Austria. The respective paper stated that this decision had been taken "particularly by taking into account the citizens' subjective perception of security". As in the past, the security authorities should be supported by the Federal Army. ■

0.9% for public sector staff

The wages of the civil servants and contract employees in the public sector will be increased by 0.9% as well as by a small additional income-adjusted amount as from 1 January 2010. The maximum increase is 1.2% for lower incomes. This was agreed on by the government and trade unions on 9 December 2009. The costs of the pay increase amount to 111 million euro. The beneficiaries are 210,000 public sector staff members at federal and Länder level. ■

Israel's Minister of Defence Barak pays official visit to Vienna

Israeli Minister of Defence Ehud Barak paid an official visit to Vienna on 14 December 2009, following an invitation of his Austrian counterpart Norbert Darabos. As the Ministry of Defence informed, this was the first official visit of an Israeli minister of defence to Austria. Barak was Prime Minister from 1999 to 2001. The Chairman of the Labour Party has been Minister of Defence in the Likud-led coalition government since 2007. Barak accepted the return invitation extended by Darabos during his stay in Israel in May 2008. Minister Darabos also accompanied Federal President Heinz Fischer during his state visit to Israel in December of last year. Barak's official programme includes talks with the Austrian President as well as with Chancellor Werner Faymann and Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger. At Vienna's City Hall Barak will participate in a reception hosted by the Jewish World Congress (WJC) and the Jewish Religious Community (IKG) in honour of Mayor Michael Häupl, who will be awarded the Nahum Goldmann medal. ■

Federal Chancellor Faymann at EU summit in Brussels

Chancellor Werner Faymann sees strong, growing international interest in the introduction of a financial transactions tax, which could be imposed on global investment flows in the future. "The subject is already being discussed", said Faymann on 11 December 2009 after the summit meeting of the EU heads of state and government in Brussels. Faymann underlined that practically all political parties in Austria had supported the call for the financial transactions tax for some time.

In the final document of the summit the EU heads of government requested the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to examine the introduction of an international financial transactions tax. This was the first time the Union had presented this request at Council level, said Faymann. In view of the problems of the financial sector as well as the sluggish economy, an increasing number of experts and politicians of all parties considered it necessary to create an additional source of income so as to be able to cover the expenditure on social services, education as well as of commitments at international level also in the future.

Faymann also provided details on the EU's plan of decreasing CO₂ emissions by 30% up to 2020. This proposal was, however, subject to the requirement that other economic powers would share the burden equitably. Europe could not "move on alone", industrial activity would become impossible, said Faymann.

The EU Member States agreed to propose short-term climate aid of 7.2 billion euro to the developing countries at the World Climate Conference in Copenhagen. According to Faymann, Austria would participate with annual contributions of 120 million euro and 40 million euros (up to 2012); the respective amounts could be adjusted, if necessary. It is the aim of the EU to provide 2.4 billion euro annually for fast-start financing of climate protection measures in the poorest countries of the world before the entry into force of a new international climate protection agreement in 2013. ■

Federal Chancellor Faymann met with Serbian President Tadic

During the Congress of the Party of European Socialists (PES) in Prague on 8 December 2009, Chancellor Werner Faymann also held talks with Serbian President Boris Tadic. The two politicians were pleased about the fact that the EU foreign ministers in Brussels had given the green light for implementing the interim trade agreement with Serbia. They were of the opinion that the interim agreement fostered Serbia's EU integration and contributed to the long-term stabilisation of South Eastern Europe. ■

Positive results of Austria's UN Security Council Chair

Under the Austrian Chair in November, the UN Security Council had dealt with the comprehensive agenda "smoothly and successfully", said Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger at the end of the one-month Austrian Chairmanship of the Security Council of the United Nations on 30 November 2009. He was highly pleased about having made a "substantial contribution", which would "really have an impact" on the future work of the UN and above all the peace missions, with its initiative to improve the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, stated Spindelegger. ■

Hypo Alpe Adria nationalised, savings deposits secure

The Republic of Austria will take over 100% of the shares of the crisis-ridden Hypo Group Alpe Adria (HGAA) to avoid bankruptcy of Austria's sixth largest bank. The Federal Republic acquires the bank at a symbolic price of 3 euro. If the Federal Republic had not saved the bank, a "dramatic situation" would have arisen, explained Minister of Finance Josef Pröll after 17 hours of negotiations in the morning of 14 December 2009. Besides Pröll and the former owners (Bayerische Landesbank holding a 67%-share in Hypo, the Land of Carinthia, Grazer Wechselseitige), the bosses of Austria's four largest banks (Erste Bank, Bank Austria, Raiffeisen Zentralbank, Bawag) as well as Bavarian Minister of Finance Georg Fahrenschon had participated in the talks in Vienna.

The three former owners contribute a total of more than 1 billion euro; 825 million euro come from BayernLB, 200 million euro from the Land of Carinthia (guarantees extended amounting to 18 billion euro) and 30 million euro from the insurance company Grazer Wechselseitige. The Federal Republic makes available 450 million euro. Hence, Hypo will benefit from a total capital injection of 1.5 billion euro. The equity ratio which shrank drastically after depreciation increases by more than the double to 8%. Furthermore, the bank receives liquid funds of 3.4 billion euro from the former owners. The leading banks of the Austrian banking system also participated in the rescue operation and agreed to provide 500 million euro as liquid funds or for risk-reduction measures (e.g. guarantees).

The most important message for the about 130,000 customers in Austria as well as the clients and employees of the South Eastern European subsidiaries is that the savings deposits have been secured, the banking business is carried on as usual and that the bank has been stabilised. At a joint press conference the public was informed that – based on the business continuity plan – decisions regarding the segments to be strengthened and to be sold would be taken.

Minister of Finance Pröll referred to the most critical situation in the domestic banking sector of the last decades. There had been a great risk of insolvency, which could be avoided. According to Pröll, ECB boss Jean-Claude Trichet had also intervened during the night of negotiations, warning against a domino effect if a bank crucial

to the banking system such as Hypo went bankrupt. According to Chancellor Werner Faymann, the Republic had been saved from major damage and Austria's image as a sound financial market had been safeguarded. By nationalising Hypo Alpe Adria, jobs, savings deposits and wage accounts had been protected. This measure was also essential to ensure the functioning of Carinthia's economy. The government expected the judicial authorities and independent courts to clear up all criminal and civil allegations in the case, underlined the Federal Chancellor. ■

Central Europe's first natural gas exchange in Vienna

The Central European Gas Hub (CEGH), a subsidiary of the oil group OMV, and Vienna Stock Exchange launched the first natural gas exchange in Central Europe on 11 December 2009. In some weeks Vienna Stock Exchange will acquire a 20%-share of CEGH, the Russian gas group Gazprom is to follow as a partner. However, Brussels still has to give the green light. The decision will probably become available in about six months.

Gazprom's participation was desirable as the "most important player" should be involved, Minister for Economic Affairs Mitterlehner told reporters. However, the Russian participation should not go beyond a minority holding. According to Stock Exchange CEO Heinrich Schaller, fears were unjustified that Gazprom, as the sole gas supplier, could manipulate the price by controlling supply: "The stock exchange is the best instrument to counteract such risks."

The gas distributed through the gas hub in Baumgarten had already been traded in the past. But the new exchange was "optimised technically", Mitterlehner underlined the significance of the new gas exchange. In times of crisis, the market was working better than "government regulation and rationing". ■

OeBN revises GDP forecast

On 10 December 2009, the Austrian National Bank (OeNB) issued a significant upward revision of its growth forecasts, expecting growth rates of 1.2% and 1.6%, respectively, for 2010 and 2011. This is 1.6 and 0.4% above the level of the GDP estimates of June. The GDP of the current year is expected to decline by 3.5%. ■

Linz 09: Bert Brecht's "Jungle of Cities" at Landestheater

The young writer from Augsburg Bertold Brecht worked on his play "Im Dichicht der Stadt" ("Jungle of Cities") between autumn 1921 and winter 1922. The world premiere took place at Residenz Theater in Munich in May 1923 – some months before Hitler's March to Feldherrnhalle. The audience reacted with storms of applause and booing, Nazis threw gas bombs among the theatregoers.

In fact, such a provoking and modern piece about the "struggle of two men in the mega-city Chicago in 1912" had never been seen before. And its new and shocking language was concise, hard, every sentence a punch. The drama was written in the form of a boxing match, every scene representing a new round. Without apparent reason, the rich ageing Malaysian lumber merchant Shlink provokes George Garga, a young and underpaid library clerk, he attempts to buy him, his opinions and his family members. A struggle is developing, slowly, quietly, and finally becomes a question of life and death. Brecht explained about his early stroke of genius in his essay "On looking through my first plays" (1954) how "singularly difficult" it was to bring about and maintain a "meaningful fight, which based on what I thought then, was a struggle that demonstrated something. Gradually it turned into a play about the difficulty of bringing about such a fight. The main characters took all kinds of measures to attack. The family of the fighter, his workplace and so on became the arena of their fight. The belongings of the other fighter were also 'used' (and in this way – without being aware of it – I came very close to the real battle that was going on and which I only idealised, i.e. class struggle). In the end, the battle revealed itself to the fighters for what it really was, pure shadow boxing; they could not come to grips even as enemies".

Finally the Malaysian gives in after having played with all the means at his disposal and telling Garga: "Get a grip on yourself, Garga. I love you", while the latter only said coolly "It is a simple as that, Shlink: the younger man wins". But basically they agree. Shlink: "People are so impossibly alone – you can never arrive at real hatred. But even with animals you can't make yourself understood". Garga: "You can't make yourself understood by speaking". While Shlink dies in the arms of Marie Gargas, the sister of

George, whom he was incapable of loving, George Garga leaves for New York: "To be alone – that's a good thing to be. The chaos has been used up. And it was the best time".

Every sentence is an electric shock. Brecht had never been so close to expressionism like in this early play. Ostentatiously he excluded all psychological motivation. He recorded in his diary for 10 February 1922: "I hope to have avoided a common artistic error in 'Baal' and 'Jungle', that of trying to carry people away. Instinctively I distance the audience from the action and make sure to limit my effects (of a poetic and philosophical nature) to the stage. The splendid isolation of the spectator is not violated (...)".

This is only partly true. At Landestheater Linz on 5 December 2009 the first-nighters were spell-bound by the mysterious wrestling on the stage fenced in by Catherine Rankl and the music performed by the band Fuckhead from Linz, whose members Siegmair Aigner and Didi Bruckmayr presented Brecht's connecting texts suggestively.

The play could not have found a better director than Matthias Langhoff (born in 1941), who had given his debut as a director at Berliner Ensemble already in 1963, then worked with Manfred Karge at Berliner Volksbuhne, became famous for his productions in France and, together with Heiner Muller, headed Berliner Ensemble in the 1990s. Langhoff was responsible for important world premieres of plays by Muller and Thomas Brasch. He produced an accurate and impressive "Jungle of Cities", avoiding a simplistic transfer to the present. And anyway, Brecht's work spotlights class hatred, homophobia, the degradation of women, racism against "yellow skins" and "negroes". Only a casual allusion is made to the Swiss plebiscite banning minarets. Battles are fought everywhere, as the floundering "Salvation Army Officer" said in "Jungle of Cities": "People are too durable, that's their main trouble. They can do too much to themselves, they last too long". Langhoff involves the audience in the action of the play. Before the intermission, the prompter addresses the audience, the director forms part of the film shown in the intermission.

The actors bring out the brittleness of the characters in a world that is difficult to control. Konstantin Buhler, for example, gives a very credible performance as the timid librarian developing into a self-confident man who would stop at nothing. Stefan Matousch has all the facets

of Shlink's character, self-assured and cool, servile, likeable and ultimately unfathomable and hopeless. Wanda Worch is a feast for the eyes as Marie Garga, who also lives in constant peril. Sven-Christian Habich as the father John Garga and Melita Jurisic as mother Mae Garga convincingly portray the bourgeois-Proletarian couple. The remaining cast is also excellent, e.g. with Nancy Mensah-Offei playing the mute Papuan whore Wadi.

Brecht said still in 1954 that his early plays, including "Jungle of Cities", showed "how the great flood breaks upon the bourgeois world. First, there is still land, but with puddles that are turning into ponds and straits; then there is only the dark water far and wide, with islands that quickly crumble". Even if he probably failed to assess all aspects of the process of change, this does not make his views less true – as the superb performance held in the framework of the European Capital of Culture Linz 2009 proves. Although the play takes about 3½ hours, time flies, especially as the audience is stunned by the powerful language of the young Bert Brecht. Besides, the unique production of Ong Keng Sen's "The Good Person of Setzuan" is still running at Landestheater (see News from Austria 19/09. www.landestheater-linz.at ■

Haydn Year 09: "Il mondo della luna" at Theater an der Wien

A spectacular premiere of "Il mondo della luna" ("The World on the Moon") took place at Theater an der Wien just before the Haydn Year 2009 is coming to an end. Buonafede – a rich, tyrannical man believing in the stars is supposedly taken to the moon in an intrigue but is in reality just taken for a ride. Some cheaters stage a farce for him to trick him into agreeing to the marriages of his two daughters and a servant, to which the foolish stargazer would have refused to give his consent on the earth. The text is based on a libretto by Carlo Goldoni, which the composer turned into a lot of fun.

Nikolaus Harnoncourt and his Concentus Musicus Wien created a profound interpretation of the score. The very original conductor clearly has a strong affinity for Haydn, who knew how to seduce the listeners. Harnoncourt is the ideal interpreter of Haydn's work, bringing out nuances of dazzling beauty from the music. He creates a special aura around complex passages, and the audience holds its breath when, after a moment of

silence, the wind instruments are played softly and the whole orchestra joins in.

However, the performance of Tobias Moretti as the stage director is not so convincing, taking the plot and characters influenced by the *comedia dell'arte* to a different level by emphasising slapstick. The director makes full use of the stage machinery and adds a contemporary touch with surveillance cameras, cybersex and video screens (stage setting: Renate Martin und Andreas Donhauser, costumes: Heidi Hackl).

The cast sings and acts excellently. Despite his young age, Dietrich Henschel ideally embodies Buonafede, the peculiar-comical old lecher, who wants to live out his fantasies on the moon. Bernhard Richter gives a compelling performance as the astrological villain thanks to his full, creamy voice and great joy of acting, Vivica Genaux, Christina Landshamer, Anja Nina Bahrmann and Maite Beaumont sing their arias impeccably, and Markus Schäfer is a pale moon emperor, excellently suited to the role.

The first-night audience cheered the 80-year-old Nikolaus Harnoncourt, who also celebrated his birthday and Saint's day, the orchestra as well as the singers. But also the apparently exhausted Tobias Moretti was applauded.

www.theater-wien.at ■

Josef Haydn stimulates tourism

A first review of the Haydn Year 2009 has been presented still before the final curtain of "Il mondo della luna" falls in December.

865,000 euro – 200,000 euro of which flow back through EU funding – were invested in marketing activities for the Haydn Year. According to Österreich Werbung (Austrian Tourist Office), the advertising value achieved through the public reached amounts to 11.4 million euro.

Above all the Burgenland, where most concerts and exhibitions took place, benefited from a "giant image leap in Europe" in the wake of the Haydn Year, as Director of the Tourist Office for Burgenland Gerhard Gucher stressed. A total of 4,000 events was organised, even in tiny communities, which attracted 435,000 visitors. About 99% of the tickets for Haydn concerts were sold.

But Josef Haydn provided impetus also to tourism in Vienna. 10,000 visitor nights alone can be attributed to choirs that came from the USA to sing in Haydn events in Austria.

The refurbished "Haydn House" reported an increase in visitors from 3,000 to 25,000,

corresponding to a plus of 800 percent.

“Culture is our anchor currency“, said Director of the Vienna Tourist Office Norbert Kettner, who is already busy preparing the Mahler Years 2010 and 2011. There would not be any coordinated “Mahler Year“, composers should not be celebrated excessively“, said Kettner. The communication strategy focused on “fin-de-siècle Vienna“.

“Papa Haydn“, as the composer was nicknamed, also made Lower Austria happy in 2009. A total of 30,000 people visited his place of birth in Rohrau and a series of events at Kulturfabrik Hainburg (“Hainburg Culture Factory”). Thanks to Haydn, “The World behind Vienna” (“Die Welt hinter Wien“ – as a volume of essays by Martin Leidenfrost is titled) became the focus of attention. In 2011 the official exhibition of Lower Austria will take place under the motto “Conquering and Discovering“ in a region of Lower Austria, the “Roman land of Carnuntum“. ■

StifterHaus in Linz: Peter Handke

Until 9 February 2010, “StifterHaus” in Linz shows manuscripts and photos of Peter Handke in a retrospective covering five decades of his artistic work. The earliest document of Handke’s literary talent is the school essay “Meine Füllfeder” (“My Fountain Pen”), written when he was only 14 years old. The exhibits of the show come from Peter Handke’s pre-death estate acquired in late 2007 by the Austrian Literature Archives of the Austrian National Library as well as the Peter Handke Collection of Hans Widrich, which was given on loan to the Austrian Literature Archives in May 2009.

www.stifterhaus.at ■

On the death of Alfred Hrdlicka

The Austrian sculptor, drawer and painter Alfred Hrdlicka died aged 81 years on 5 December 2009. He studied under Fritz Wotruba, had his first exhibition in Vienna in 1960 and gained international attention as Austria’s representative at the Venice Biennale in 1964.

Many of his works address the horrors of National Socialism – among the Memorial against War and Fascism at Vienna’s Abertinaplatz next to the State Opera. The monument was inaugurated in 1988. Reminding of Hitler fascism in Austria, its centrepiece is a crouched Jew scrubbing the pavement. A storm of protest from Conservative

and right-wing circles was unleashed against the location of the memorial and against the alleged “Stalinist” Hrdlicka. Hrdlicka had been a member of the Communist Party of Austria (KPÖ) since 1947, but resigned his party membership after the Russian invasion in Prague in 1968. Later he positioned himself as a left-wing Socialist and claimed that he had been responsible for the foundation of the party “Die Linke“ (“The Left”) as he had introduced Gregor Gysi and Oskar Lafontaine to one another.

In the recent past, Alfred Hrdlicka, physically weak from old age and disease, was no longer able to work as a sculptor.

Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann was deeply moved by the death of the artist: “Alfred Hrdlicka’s stance against suffering, fear and threat and his engagement for the social and political rights of the people is as closely linked to his oeuvre as his artistic combat against war, violence and fascism. He was a strict admonisher against injustice and suppression, vehemently fighting against it in his works, very often in a drastic manner. Austria does not only lose an outstanding personality in the arts, but also a fighter, a loud voice for a better world. His achievements and his work have already assured him a safe and unshakable place in the history of our country“. ■

The Children of Maison d’Izieu

Under the aegis of Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann, the photo exhibition “The Children of Maison d’Izieu” will be presented at numerous vocational schools across Austria until the end of 2010.

“Maison d’Izieu” – the children’s home in the French city located 80 km from Lyon accommodated more than 100 Jewish children of different nationalities from May 1943 to April 1944, whose parents had already been deported by the Nazis. On 6 April 1944, 44 children – 7 from Vienna – and their educators were arrested under Klaus Barbie’s command, the head of Gestapo in Lyon. With the exception of two children and the headmaster, who were shot in Reval (Estonia), the group was deported to Auschwitz. The children and their educators were gassed shortly after their arrival. Only an educator, who had returned from Auschwitz, and one adult, who had escaped upon arrest, survived.

For more information: www.milliseagal.at ■

One year of government: Minister of Sport presents positive results

In February 2009, Norbert Darabos also became Minister of Sport, adopting a new and highly respected approach to sports policy in Austria.

In spring the Minister did not only announce the highest sports budget of all times – 112 million euro – but also his goal of a comprehensive reform of the Austrian sports funding system. “The sports funding model dates back to the post-war period and has been in need of reform for some time. Therefore, I would like to develop a new Sports Promotion Act by 2011. In this context, three aspects are crucial to me. Funding has to become more targeted and replace the inefficient dispersing of financial aid. Funding has to go directly to the athletes, otherwise too much money trickles away into a bloated administration. And it has to become more transparent and subject to professional audits.” Together with Parliament, the Minister took a major step towards a comprehensive reform of the federal sports promotion scheme as early as in April by adopting the transitional rules in Section 11a of the Act. Now it has become possible to react flexibly to the current needs of the sports organisations and to provide targeted support to successful associations, clubs, sports events and athletes.

Darabos also guarantees a consistent anti-doping policy in Austria. The Minister of Sport caused a stir when he reiterated his public appeal for a stricter punishment of doping offenders. Darabos put his words into action. In the end he succeeded in convincing Parliament and to push through more stringent anti-doping provisions. On 1 January 2010 the amended Section 147 of the Penal Code (“serious fraud”) will enter into force, making fraud in sports punishable.

As a co-opted member of the Managing Board of the Austrian Olympic Committee (ÖOC), the Minister had insisted for months on an investigation into the allegations concerning the financial management of the ÖOC that had been revealed by the media. The “drilling of hard boards” showed first results in February at the level of the Secretary-General. In summer, the findings of the investigations, which uncovered more in-accuracies, were presented to the ÖOC Managing Board. In September the ÖOC Managing Board brought charge against former Secretary-General Heinz Jungwirth with the public prosecutor’s office. Some days later ÖOC

President Leo Wallner resigned. In late September the entire ÖOC Managing Board handed in its resignation, allowing the Austrian Olympic movement to make a fresh start.

In November the Minister of Sport – together with Minister of Education Claudia Schmied – presented a five-point package to promote physical exercise in nurseries and primary schools. The key elements of this set of measures are a quality campaign for improving physical education in primary schools, a framework agreement to involve sports organisation in school routines, re-launching and revaluating the Federal School Sports Championships, two million euro for measures of the sports federations promoting exercise in primary schools and nurseries as well as placing more emphasis on sports programmes in further developing all-day schools. In addition, the inter-ministerial working group “Sport and Youth” has been set up. It is responsible for coordinating the measures and will serve as a platform for the exchange of information and the management of joint projects and measures also in the future. ■

Darabos: “Rogan made comeback as a very great athlete!”

Minister of Sport Norbert Darabos was highly pleased about the performance of the Austrian swimmers at the European Short-Course Swimming Championships in Istanbul. The crowning success was the truly glittery comeback of gold medallist Markus Rogan, winning the men’s 200m individual medley and setting a new European record. Darabos: “I congratulate Rogan on his triumph. He made his comeback as a truly great athlete. After the incidents in Rome, I wished him a continuation of his success story from the bottom of my heart. Rogan had shaped the Austrian sport through his outstanding accomplishments during many years. Unfortunately, these countless positive moments had been overshadowed by the World Championships in Rome. In any case, he gave a clear answer to his critics with this important victory”, said Darabos, who had demanded “more fairness” for Rogan in a letter to the editor of a newspaper only recently.

Thanks to the bronze medal of Dinko Jukic (men’s 200m butterfly) and 14 national swimming records, Austria’s reputation as a nation of swimmers continues to grow. ■