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Government agrees on tax reform and funding of insurance system

The federal government agreed on the tax package and the financial restructuring of the health insurance system at its closed-door meeting in Sillian (eastern Tyrol) on 10 February 2009. The tax reform would lead to a tax relief of a total of 3.2 billion euros, bridge financing would be made available to ensure the solvency of the health insurance institutions, Chancellor Werner Faymann and Minister of Finance Josef Pröll informed at a joint press conference. Moreover, a fund for health insurance institutions is to be set up, to which 100 million euros annually will be allocated. Payments will start in 2010 provided that “savings potentials in the health sector are defined and taken advantage of”, Faymann stressed. “No money without sustainable reforms”, was also the credo of Minister of Finance Pröll.

The financial restructuring of the health insurance institutions and the health system in Austria should not be to the detriment of the patients and had to be safeguarded on a long-term basis, Faymann stated. The planned fund, in which the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Finance are to cooperate, is to control austerity measures. The Chancellor announced close cooperation with the doctors and health insurance institutions: “We expect cost-cutting measures in exchange for financial support.” Details still needed to be negotiated with the “partners” of the health sector. For 2009 bridge financing of 30 to 50 million euros is to be granted to ensure the liquidity of the health insurance institutions. In addition to the new fund and this year’s bridge financing, between 2010 and 2012 150 million euros annually (or 450 million in total) will be made available for a partial debt relief of the health insurance institutions, whose total debt amounts to 1.2 billion euros. Faymann also highlighted that the VAT rate on medical products had already been cut, benefiting the insurance institutions with another 100 million euros in 2009.

The tax reform was also finalised. The package was approved by the Council of Ministers, which for the first time was not held in Vienna. “All those paying taxes”, but above all the middle class and families as well as entrepreneurs, would profit, the Minister of Finance explained. The volume of tax relief measures totals 3.2 billion euros. The reform is to enter into force retroactively on 1 January 2009, in April the

money will be transferred to the accounts of the taxpayers. The largest share (2.3 billion euros) is due to the reform of tax rates. Measures amounting to 510 million euros are envisaged for families, including higher deductible amounts for children, an additional tax allowance for children and the deductibility of childcare expenses. For childcare alone, which must, however, be provided by “pedagogically qualified” persons, 2,300 euros per year may be written off.

Stock options for managers will no longer benefit from favourable tax treatment. This will result in an increase in tax yield for the state of about 30 million euros annually. Entrepreneurs and freelancers will, however, be granted a tax exemption of 13% for profits up to 30,000 euros to compensate for the tax-supported 13th and 14th monthly salaries of employees. This will cost the government 300 million euros, of which 150 million euros are counter-financed.

The deductible amount for church membership fees is increased from 100 to 200 euros. As a result, the government will lose between 20 and 30 million euros. This amount is counter-financed by taxing share options for managers. The tax package also provides for the deductibility of donations to charities. ■

Commemorating the victims of 12 February 1934

On 11 February 2009 President Heinz Fischer commemorated the bloody clashes of 12 February 1934. It is on this date, 75 years ago, that the Social Democratic revolt against the authoritarian Dollfuß regime had started in Linz. The battles spread to Vienna, Styria as well as Tyrol and lasted four days. Numerous people were killed and wounded in the civil war. Nine social democrats were executed by order of a court-martial. The authoritarian system of March 1933 had developed into a working democracy in the Second Republic, and the “state that nobody wanted” became a “respected member of the family of European nations”, Fischer stressed.

At a commemorative event in Vienna, SPÖ Chairman Chancellor Werner Faymann underlined that it was “our task to learn the lessons of history” and that we must “never forget”. In view of recent incidents, Faymann also warned against demagoguery and anti-Semitism in the present. “All those wanting to deny the Holocaust will have to face us as firm and determined opponents”, Faymann stated. ■

Croatian PM Sanader meets with Federal Chancellor Faymann

Croatian Prime Minister Ivo Sanader was received by Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann in Vienna on 13 February 2009. Their official talks focused on the current economic crisis but also on Croatia's EU perspective and bilateral relations. Croatia has come under pressure with regard to its efforts to join the EU. In late December Slovenia for example blocked accession talks due to a border conflict with the neighbour (about claims to the Bay of Piran on the Adriatic coast). It has in the meantime accepted a possible EU wise men's committee headed by former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari, while Zagreb wants to solve the problem based on international law (arbitration decision of the International Court of Justice), as Sanader stressed in Vienna.

Austria would continue to support Croatia in the EU accession negotiations, Federal Chancellor Faymann underlined. One should "stick together not only in good but also "in harder times". Austria had always supported the candidacy of Croatia "proactively". "We have so many things in common in political, cultural and economic terms that we can hardly find any differences", and besides Austria was not searching for them, Faymann stated. Sanader fully agreed. The Croatian head of government also showed his understanding for the recent "CEE trip" of Minister of Finance Josef Pröll (see next article). As a large-scale investor in South Eastern Europe, Austria was right to maintain close contacts with the responsible governments: "I would do the same". The Austrian banks hold the largest investments in Croatia, with a share of 66% based on the balance sheet total in the CEE region. Both sides emphasised their willingness to tackle the international financial crisis jointly.

With regard to the border dispute with Slovenia, Sanader referred to the ongoing consultation process between Brussels, Slovenia and his country. In addition, EU accession has never been linked to bilateral issues. ■

Bank package: Minister of Finance Pröll travels to Eastern Europe

After his two-day trip to Croatia, Ukraine, Romania and Bulgaria, Minister of Finance Josef Pröll was "absolutely satisfied" about the outcome. He had been received very openly

everywhere and considered his visit a starting signal for a "stability partnership", Pröll explained on 12 February 2009.

The Minister of Finance toured the countries in which Austrian banks hold major investments. Austria extended a total credit volume of 230 billion euros in the region. His message was that Austria had contributed a lot towards stabilising the parent banks, now the Eastern European countries had to ensure stable exchange rates, liquid funds in the national currencies as well as orderly budget implementation, Pröll stated.

Pröll was by no means irritated that Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria had highlighted the soundness of their national economy. It was good to be optimistic that "one would succeed". Nevertheless, all countries were prepared to cooperate in Europe. In concrete terms, an agreement had been reached "to intensify the stability partnership" and to establish substantially closer contacts. At European level, Pröll plans to put his initiative of supporting the banking system and economy in Eastern and South Eastern Europe on the agenda of the next EU Council of Ministers of Finance (9/10 March 2009). ■

Foreign Minister Spindelegger pays visit to Hungary

Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger met with his Hungarian counterpart Kinga Göncz in Budapest on 12 February 2009. In a joint press conference both sides stressed that they wished to continue strengthening the traditionally intensive bilateral contacts. Key topics were environmental and energy questions, cooperation in visa affairs, the Danube region cooperation as well as regional partnerships. Hungary calls for "acceptable solutions" of environmental problems, e.g. pollution of the Raab river by Austrian companies close to the border and the planned waste incineration plant in Heiligenkreuz. This had to be solved locally, Spindelegger explained.

According to Minister Spindelegger, cooperation between Austria and Hungary was also important in visa affairs, within the Regional Partnership, and in particular with regard to the further development of the Western Balkans countries. Furthermore, Spindelegger emphasised his intention to uphold the tradition of joint government meetings between Hungary and Austria. ■

Government extends credits to small and mid-sized enterprises

As announced by Minister for Economic Affairs Reinhold Mitterlehner, the government will start extending credits to Austrian small and medium-sized enterprises already in May through the bank *aws* (Austria Wirtschaftsservice), which is associated with the Ministry of Economy and wholly owned by the Federal Republic. According to Minister for Economic Affairs Mitterlehner, *aws* should make available small-scale financing. Research, development and energy projects would be prioritised.

The application for widening the scope of the current bank license had already been filed, *aws* boss Johann Moser told the Austrian Press Agency (APA) on 3 February 2009. Credits of a volume of 200 million euros should be placed still this year. An increase to 600 million euros was possible, Moser said.

With the new *aws*, the government has two government-owned banks authorised to extend credits. *Kommunalkredit*, a bank specialised in the financing of municipalities, was nationalised in 2008 to avoid bankruptcy proceedings.

aws would not compete with commercial banks, Moser explained. Additional credit facilities would be created and liquid funds would be offered where the banks acted reluctantly. Before extending credits, the credit worthiness would be examined. Ailing enterprises would certainly not receive any operating credits, Moser stated. He expected a strong demand for this service. Minister for Economic Affairs Mitterlehner had told reporters on 2 February 2009 that the wider scope of the bank license of *aws* was necessary as not all banks would participate in extending ERP loans and “nothing was moving in the market”.

Both in the euro zone and in Austria, companies face increasing difficulties in obtaining credits. According to a survey of the European Central Bank (ECB), companies were to face stricter requirements also in the first quarter 2009. In Austria the banks had tightened their lending terms already during six quarters in a row, informed the Austrian National Bank (OeNB) on 6 February 2009. Apart from the higher interest spread, collateral, the amount and due date of credits extended, additional agreements and supplementary stipulations as well as the incidental charges of loans were subject to more stringent provisions. ■

Austrian economy records slight decline

The Economic Research Institute (Wifo) informed in a first flash estimate on 13 February 2009 that the Austrian economy shrank for the first time in the last quarter 2008, i.e. by 0.2 % compared to the previous quarter. The downward trend was driven by the export-oriented industry, while the economy was supported by domestic demand, trade and tourism. Austria's main trading partners Germany and Italy had to register a decline around 2% in their quarterly statistics.

The minus of 0.2% from the third quarter 2008 was the first decline since 2001. Austria is not yet in a recession but is heading towards it. Recession is defined as two consecutive quarters of falling GDP. Growth registered in the last quarter of 2008 was only 0.3% above the level of the same period of the previous year.

Nevertheless, Austria's economic data were considerably better than those of its main trading partners: Germany recorded minus 2.1% and Italy minus 1.8% from the level of the previous quarter. The countries of the euro zone shrank by 1.5% on average.

Wifo explains this by a delayed development in Austria (e.g. car components supplying industry), the still relatively high propensity to consume of private households as well as the price stability in the real-estate market. ■

Conference tourism is booming

The trade union for the tourist sector considers any statements about the effects of the economic crisis on tourism premature. Although “individual problems” could not be excluded (e.g. business trips), a sound assessment of the situation could be made only in summer, the chairman of the trade union *vida*, Rudolf Kaske, said on 4 February 2009. The hotels in the ski regions were fully booked, new record levels would be reached in conference and trade fair tourism in 2009.

After climbing to a high in 2008, a slight decline is expected in employment. But while unemployment rose by 12.2% throughout Austria in January, the number of jobless people in tourism increased by only 6.2%. According to Kaske, layoffs would mainly affect qualified personnel. Short-time working was not up for discussion at the moment. ■

Haydn-Jahr 09: "Le pescatrici – The Fisher Girls" at Vienna Chamber Opera House

In his standard work about Joseph Haydn's life and oeuvre "Joseph Haydn. Leben und Werk" (Böhlau Verlag, Vienna 2007) German musicologist Hans-Josef Irmen provides a detailed description of the historical background of "Le pescatrici". Opera, puppet theatre, illumination, fireworks and balls played an important role in the social life of the Esterházy court. For the wedding of Alois Count Poggi with Maria Theresa Countess Lamberg, the niece of the governing prince, Haydn wrote this "dramma giocoso" in 1770. In this three-act opera semiseria the composer explored this genre for first time. The excellent libretto by Carlo Goldoni was adapted for performance on a small scale by Karl Friberth, Haydn's principal tenor and skilled dramaturg, who also spoke Italian.

The dramaturgy is based on a then very popular theme: two couples, still unmarried, find out that that they are no longer so sure of having chosen the right partner. And once more the women turn out to be the fickle, the "morally more flexible". The whole story is set in a "fishing village".

Of course this reminds of "Così fan tutte" but Haydn's "pescatrici" are more light-footed, more playful than the characters created by Mozart and Lorenzo da Ponte in 1790. Everything stays on the surface, in the most charming way. No serious wounds are inflicted – apart from the general problem that women and men simply do not go together, as the German satirist Lorient once put it. Haydn's emotional opera has so far shared the fate of his early operas falling into oblivion. Italian composer Giuseppe Carpani had thought it lost in his brilliant biography "Le Haydine ovvero lettere sulla vita e le opere del celebre maestro Giuseppe Haydn" published in Milan in 1812. On the initiative of Nikolaus Harnoncourt, the first (!) German translation of this book appeared in Residenz Verlag in 2009: "Haydn. Sein Leben". The excellent translation and comments are by Johanna Fürstauer.

In a fire raging in the theatre building of Esterháza in 1779 numerous valuable autographs had been destroyed, among them also parts of "Le pescatrici". Famous Haydn researcher H. C. Robbins Landon and composer Karl Heinz Füssl tried to reconstruct the opera. In the Haydn Year 2009 it is presented as an extraordinary opera rarity at Vienna's Chamber Opera House (Wiener

Kammeroper, 1010 Vienna, Fleischmarkt 24) up to 21 March 2009. The premiere on 21 February 2009 is already sold out.

Daniel Hoyem-Cavazza is responsible for the musical direction, conducting the Vienna Chamber Opera Orchestra. The production is by Peter Pawlik; Maria Pavlova und Norbert Chmel are in charge of the stage setting and light design. The octet of singers gives an outstanding performance, the fishers are not only an acoustic pleasure: Jennifer Davison, Auxiliadora Toledano, Leif Aruhn-Solén and José Aparicio. Anna Pierard represents a princely girl with an innate nobility of the mind, who was probably meant to portray the bride, Countess Lamberg.

www.wienerkammeroper.at,

www.boehlau.de, www.residenzverlag.at ■

Linz09: Festival of Regions in the south of the European Capital of Culture

This year the Upper Austrian Festival of Regions cooperates with Linz 2009, the European Capital of Culture. The Festival titled "Normal State" has been designed to reach 13,000 people living in the "urban villages" in the south of Linz – Auwiesen and solarCity – and starts on 9 May 2009. 30 projects will be presented during 24 days. Auwiesen and solarCity were built in the 1980s and late 1990s, respectively.

In "Normal State", the project managers plan to place even stronger emphasis than in past festivals on local references and the direct participation of the population. This approach will be realised by festival participants moving to flats in Auwiesen, or walking the dog and meeting other dog owners (in the project "Gassi") as well as camping in different buildings – in a climbing hall, a school and an electricity plant. Together with the local urban dwellers, they will build "Acropolis Linz" made of cardboard on a scale of 1:3 or perform New Music: "A Breeze" by composer Mauricio Kagel for 111 cyclists. Free Radio Upper Austria (Freies Radio Oberösterreich/FRO) will broadcast from Auwiesen during the whole festival.

The Festival of Regions has taken place every two years since 1993 with changing venues in Upper Austria. It has been conceived as a contemporary event outside urban centres for present-day art and culture with a local focus.

www.fdr.at, www.linz09.at ■

Magic arts. In Linz and the world. A project of the Capital of Culture

Industry and trade, technology and post-war reconstruction determine the image of Linz. The other side of the city – that is lusting for sensation and irrational, superstitious and eccentric – has remained almost undiscovered, as cultural researcher Brigitte Felderer wrote. Few people today know something about the illusionists, experimenters, cheaters, animal tamers, puppet players, wonder doctors, occultists, fortune-tellers, escape artists and quick-change artists, ventriloquists and voice imitators, laternists and phantasmagorists, hypnotisers and manipulators, mind-readers and professors of natural magic, who have performed regularly in Linz and Upper Austria since the 18th century. The audience in Linz crowded the varieties, the squares, streets and lanes, the red-light districts and back rooms, the markets and fairs in spring and late summer. The local nobility, the peasant population as well as the citizens from the neighbouring towns and rural communities – they all wanted to enjoy themselves, were curious about the sensations and rarities presented to them. Social boundaries were not eliminated but seemed less important. The showers and performers opened up a world in between social classes. Social hierarchies were reflected in different admission fees but not necessarily in different predilections. Entertainment of this type did not offer a ceremonial setting for making an impressive public appearance. Those came who felt like it. Amusement and leisure activities were driven by individual needs and no longer succumbed to social pressures of self-representation.

The exhibition “Magic Arts (”Zauberkünste“) in the Nordico Museum of the City of Linz (Dametzstraße 23) presents objects, magic apparatuses, automatic machines, interactive installations, magic art as a predecessor of media art, artistic works and documents from then to today (on show until 26 April 2009).

The curator of the show, Brigitte Felderer, published a richly illustrated album titled “Zauberkünste. In Linz und der Welt“ (“Magic Arts. In Linz and the World”), Folio Verlag Vienna-Bolzano.

Without the sponsorship of the company Hofer KG and its original programme “culture as food”, the sensational exhibition would not have been possible. www.nordico.at ■

Vienna: Anish Kapoor at MAK

The Museum of Applied Arts (MAK) in Vienna presents the impressive show “Shooting into the Corner“ by Indian-born British sculptor and Turner Prize winner Anish Kapoor. The visitors are confronted with four blood-red wax sculptures, which are continuously gaining in mass or shrinking. The central piece is the sculpture after which the exhibition is named. At the end of the exhibition (19 April 2009) it is expected to consist in 20 tons of wax – fired into a corner of the room with a cannon. In the central exhibition hall of the MAK the visitors can see what happens to eleven kilograms of wax when they are fired with an air compressor at a speed of 50 km per hour against the wall. A staff member wearing black first slowly loads the cannon developed by a team of engineers and then fires it with an ear-splitting bang. “In his context ‘work in progress’ acquires a new meaning“, MAK Director Peter Noever stated. The sculpture created during this process was growing in the absence of the artist, so to speak. He “enciphers solutions, does not satisfy fantasy but make it hungry“, Noever said.

The now London-based artist Anish Kapoor was born in India in 1954. Since the 1980s he has produced sculptures inspired in this country of birth. They revolve around emptiness, transformation, immateriality, faith or passion. The main purpose of the objects exhibited in Vienna is to irritate the onlookers through permanent transformation. This exercise seems to be successful.

A comprehensive exhibition catalogue will be out in March (produced by the publishing house Hatje Cantz). The MAK Special Edition is now available. www.mak.at ■

Berlinale 09: “Der Knochenmann“ enthusiastically acclaimed

The premiere of the film adaptation of Wolf Haas’ “Der Knochenmann“ (“The Bone Man”), directed by Austrian Wolfgang Murnberger, at the Panorama cinema of Berlinale 09 on 9 February 2009 was received enthusiastically by the audience and press. “Tagesspiegel“ and “taz“ praised the black-humoured Alpine thriller starring Josef Hader as Inspector Brenner, Josef Bierbichler as the “Löschenkohl“ innkeeper and Birgit Minich-mayr as femme fatale. “taz“ put it very aptly: “Haas, Hader and Murnberger, all three of them real

connoisseurs of the Austrian way of life, only know too well how harmless the unfathomable presents itself and how innocent the most evil may appear. Those killing in this film do it quite guilelessly. Every scene is ambiguous, makes you roar and laugh at the same time – and sometimes makes you weep tears“.

We do not give away the story, please check it out yourself. ■

Important award to Wander Bertoni

Minister of Culture Claudia Schmied recently conferred the Austrian Cross of Honour for Science and Art, 1st Class, granted by Federal President Heinz Fischer, to Wander Bertoni, one of Austria's most important sculptors. The presentation speech was given by architect Friedrich Kurrent.

Wander Bertoni was born in Codisetto (Reggio Emilia/Italy) in 1925. In 1943 he came to Vienna as an Italian forced labourer. After 1945 he did not go back to Italy but studied at the Academy of Visual Arts, where he successfully completed the Master Class of Fritz Wotruba. Since then he has lived and worked in Vienna and in Winden (Burgenland), where many of his works can be admired in an open-air museum.

Wander Bertoni was a founding member of the “Art Club“ (1946) and taught from 1965 to his retirement in 1994 at the University of Applied Arts as the head of the Sculpture Master Class. He received many awards, e.g. the prize for sculpture of the Biennale Sao Paulo, the Prize of the City of Vienna and the Order of the Republic of Italy “Cavaliere d'Italia“. ■

Saarbrücken: Max Ophüls Prize goes to Austrian Thomas Woschitz

Saarbrücken recently celebrated the 30-year anniversary of the film festival Max Ophüls Prize. This year's main prize in the category full-length film was won by Austrian film director Thomas Woschitz with his feature film “Universallove“. The band Naked Lunch played live during the film screening.

In his intriguing film Woschitz tells a story about the true, crazy, desperate love, about people somewhere in this world – in Brooklyn, Tokyo or Rio – with completely different social backgrounds and of different colour, who are hit by a thunderbolt of love, who are thrown off course. www.max-ophuels-preis.de ■

Maria Lassnig: “Ninth Decade“

The Museum of Modern Art Ludwig Foundation Vienna presents “Maria Lassnig. The Ninth Decade“. This is the third one-person exhibition (after 1985 and 1999) at Mumok about the painter from Carinthia, who will celebrate her 90th birthday on 28 September 2009. It presents about 60 paintings of the past decade and was opened with a touching speech by Federal President Heinz Fischer on 12 February 2009 (running until 17 May 2009). Some paintings had been shown at solo exhibitions at the London-based Serpentine Gallery and the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati in 2008. One third of the exhibits has never been shown, most works are owned by the artist, e.g. numerous self-portraits with animals, with a frog or a duck, a ferret or a monkey, a cat or a little bird. One work titled “Lebensqualität“ (“Quality of Life”) depicts the naked swimming artist, who is nibbled by a fish under water while balancing a red wine glass above the water surface. The seafloor shows sunken cities and ships.

The exhibition is rounded off with films by Lassnig. Her animated films made in New York as well as water colours and drawings can be seen in an exhibition at Museum Ludwig in Cologne as from 14 March 2009. www.mumok.at ■

Nicholas “Nick“ Barton at the Institute of Science and Technology

The first professor of I.S.T. Austria – the Institute of Science and Technology Austria – in Maria Gugging (Lower Austria) is evolutionary biologist Nicholas Barton. He was born in London in 1955, studied genetics at the Universities of Cambridge and East Anglia. In 1990 he moved to the University of Edinburgh.

With his pioneering research, Barton has made significant contributions to the knowledge on how populations adapt and the way they diverge to form separate species.

In 2006 the scientist received the Darwin Medal of the Royal Society and recently the Darwin Wallace Medal in London, which is given every 50 years for important achievements in the field of evolutionary biology.

Besides, the 200th birthday of Charles Darwin was commemorated also in Vienna. Darwin's present-day relevance was discussed by researchers in the framework of the “Vienna Lectures“ (“Wiener Vorlesungen”). ■

New Sports Minister Norbert Darabos has ambitious agenda

On 1 February 2009 the Amendment to the Federal Ministries Act entered into force, by which the sports agenda is officially transferred from the Federal Chancellery to the incumbent Federal Minister for Defence and Sport Norbert Darabos. "I am pleased to assume these new duties", Federal Minister Darabos stated. In the next days he will arrange for the first official talks with the representatives of the Federal Sports Organisation (BSO), the federations and associations of various sports.

Working together for sport

"The organisational links of sport with the Ministry of Defence, which is highly active in sport, offers a great opportunity. With the Federal Army and the Department of Sport recently integrated into the Federal Ministry of Defence we have two strong partners on board for our successful work in sport. I would like to invite our partners in the BSO, the associations and other sports institutions to participate in a positive process of change in the next years", Darabos said.

Well-aimed support for elite sport

Minister of Sport Darabos adopted a favourable attitude towards the idea of experts to focus elite sport funding on some specific disciplines. "In high-performance sport it does not make sense to spread funds too thinly. Together with our partners in the sphere of sport, I would like to try to develop a performance-based model, which ensures that support goes to those with the right background and adequate performance levels. No particular sport should be neglected but we also must not lose sight of our goal: creating an adequate framework for top achievements."

Combat against doping

Norbert Darabos also plans to continue the combat against doping: "I take sides with the clean athletes and not with those gaining an unfair advantage by using doping substances. Doping must no longer be considered a petty offence. The existing law has been a good first step but I want to find a majority in Parliament for a tougher

Anti-Doping Act. We also have to get hold of those behind the scenes. It is certainly necessary to threaten with harsher punishment."

At the first meeting of the Parliamentary Sports Committee held on 3 February 2009, a first landmark decision was taken in cooperation with the political parties. A subcommittee of the Sports Committee will work on the amendment of the Anti-Doping Act during the next weeks.

Commitment to mass sport

The new Minister of Sport is also committed to setting new priorities regarding mass sport: "International trends show that sport and physical exercise are of increasing importance for preventive healthcare. A major concern of mine is to strengthen the cooperation between sports organisations and the health sector". In the next years current measures such as the countrywide exercise campaign "Fit for Austria" are to be continued and intensified provided that the necessary funding is available.

Minister is officially taking the helm

On his first day in office (2 February 2009), the new Minister of Sport visited the "House of Sport" in Vienna's fourth district, which also accommodates the Ministry of Sport.

Head of Department Robert Pelousek presented a symbolic key to the Ministry of Sport to Minister Darabos and welcomed the new boss on behalf of the staff of the Department. After the inaugural ceremony, the new Sports Minister took some time to talk with the staff of the "House of Sport".■

World Ski Championship: a success for Austria

At the World Ski Championship in Val d'Isère, Austria's Alpine skiers won five medals, including two gold medals. This makes them second on the medal table behind Switzerland.

31-year-old Manfred Pranger from Tyrol was responsible for the happy ending of the Alpine World Ski Championship for Austria. After four years without victories for Austria, he finally proved to be in top shape this season, which he crowned with the Slalom World Champion title.■