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Social Report: unequal distribution of income and assets

The Social Report for 2007/2008 presented by Minister for Social Affairs Rudolf Hundstorfer on 26 January 2009 reveals striking inequalities in income and monetary assets in Austria. In the past years, a shift from wages to profits and capital gains has been observed. In addition, there are enormous differences in incomes from gainful employment. In 2006 the 20% of the population with the lowest incomes earned only 2.2% of the total gross wages, while the 20% with the highest wages received 46.7%. Women still earn one third less than men, i.e. only 67% of men's pay.

Based on the Social Report, monetary assets even showed a "marked concentration". Although there are no specific statistics about the distribution of monetary assets it is a proven fact that inequalities in the distribution of monetary assets are even more pronounced than that of earned incomes. A significant majority (74%) of private households has only below-average monetary assets. The richest percent of households holds 27% of the total monetary assets. The top segment (0.1%) even owns more than 8% of the total monetary assets; the same percentage is held by the poorer half of all households.

The changed weighting pattern in incomes – from wages towards profits and capital gains is also significant. While the national income (wage incomes as well as income from profits and capital gains) increased annually by 3.6% between 1996 and 2006, the income from gainful employment rose by only 2.8%, while company profits and capital gains increased by 5.4%. The share of wages in the national income (wage share) dropped from 78.7% in 1978 to 66.6% in 2007.

About one million people in Austria is at risk of poverty. The at-risk-of-poverty threshold is 893 euros per month; this value increases by 447 euros for every additional adult living in the same household, and by 268 euros for every child. Lone parents and pensioners are affected most severely. Therefore the economic activity of women is decisive. Families without gainfully employed women face a poverty risk that is at least double that of families with working mothers. Households with three or more children record a much higher at-risk-of-poverty rate (16%) than multiple-person households without children, with one child (8%) or two children (11%). 27% of all lone parents are at risk of

poverty. The at-risk-of-poverty rate of female pensioners living alone (28%) is three times higher than that of male pensioners (9%).

In Austria the average social expenditure per person and year is about 8,500 euros (2006). The average annual expenditure per child or teenager (age group up to 19) is about 4,500 euro, per economically active person (age group 20 to 64) it is about 4,600 euros and per older person roughly 28,100 euros. About half of Austria's social expenditure goes to older people (direct pensions, survivors' benefits, long-term care benefits, social care facilities). About one fourth is earmarked for to the health system, one tenth for families, 8% for invalidity-related benefits and 6% for labour market benefits.

Without social benefits, the risk of poverty would be three times higher. Austria's social expenditure (2006: 73.3 billion euros, social expenditure/GDP ratio 28.5%) exceeds the EU average (27.2%). The Minister for Social Affairs feels once more proven right: "We should not tolerate a chillier social climate", Hundstorfer said. The Austria-wide guaranteed minimum income vetoed by Carinthia is to take effect in autumn – even without Carinthia. Hundstorfer explained that this was legally possible. Chancellor Werner Faymann also hopes that the guaranteed minimum income will be realised soon. Faymann stated in an interview with the Austrian Press Agency (APA) on 23 January 2009 that he expected Carinthia's consent after the regional elections on 1 March 2009. The introduction of the guaranteed minimum income was a decisive social policy measure. As small and medium-sized enterprises were supported, one "also had to combat poverty", Faymann said. ■

Immigration: Red-White-Red Card is to control access as from 2010

The Red-White-Red-Card will control immigration to Austria already as from 1 January 2010 and replace the previous quota system. This was announced by Minister of the Interior Maria Fekter on 26 January 2009 at the first meeting of a working group composed of representatives of the Ministry of the Interior and the social partners. A points-based system is envisaged. Criteria for assessing candidates are German language skills, capacity for self-support, labour market qualifications and no criminal record. According to Fekter, the aim was to adjust immigration "to Austria's interests accurately and flexibly". ■

Federal Chancellor Faymann pays official visit to Germany

On 28 January 2009 Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann paid his first official visit to Berlin. He was accompanied by Secretary of State Josef Ostermayer, who is responsible for coordination and media. The programme of his visit included talks with Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the leader of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) Franz Müntefering and President of the German Association of Employers Dieter Hundt. The global financial crisis was high on the agenda.

Faymann and his counterpart Merkel discussed further steps and measures to be taken in case the bank aid packages prove insufficient. The Austrian Chancellor also explained his initiative for a "package for Eastern Europe" and suggested to examine what measures could be taken by the respective countries themselves and those available to the EU and the Monetary Fund. Faymann argued that an aid package for Eastern and South Eastern European countries would not only benefit Austrian banks but also other countries such as Germany. The Austrian banks participate with 300 billion euros or 19 % in the total outstanding credit volume of the region. The planned initiative was "also a clear political signal that Eastern Europe will again be the market with the strongest growth potential in the future – as soon as the economy starts to pick up", Faymann said. Austrian Minister of Finance Josef Pröll would therefore explore possible avenues in Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Ukraine.

Merkel signalled support for the Austrian stability offensive for the Eastern European countries but did not make any binding statements. The German head of government stated that it was important that the new EU members received the political sign Austria planned to give that there was willingness to lend them a hand. ■

Chancellor Faymann in Prague

From Berlin Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann travelled to Prague, where he met with President Vaclav Klaus and his Czech counterpart Mirek Topolanek on 29 January 2009. The Czech Republic currently holds the EU Council Presidency. Again, the economic crisis as well as the planned aid package for Eastern European

financial systems were the top items on the agenda. Other burning issues were the security of energy supplies and the labour market.

Topolanek and Faymann called for effective measures to combat the financial and economic crisis. It was crucial to restore confidence in the economy and to guarantee the necessary liquidity to banks, Faymann said. To this end, the EU had to make use of all instruments and coordinate the measures. Topolanek plans to motivate the banks to invest money in the real sector of the economy. There was no "problem of liquidity but a problem of confidence", Topolanek stated. The Czech government would not solve the financial problems of the domestic subsidiaries of foreign banks. And there were no fears that the crisis-ridden parents would "drain liquidity" from the local subsidiaries, the Czech PM stressed. The background is that Austrian banks are represented strongly in the region, e.g. Raiffeisen and Erste Bank with its subsidiary Česká spořitelna in the Czech Republic.

Divergent views were held on labour market issues. According to Faymann, Austria will grant the "new" EU members unrestricted labour market access only after the end of the transition regulation in 2011. "This is a decision of (Austrian) domestic policy", Faymann explained, who also stated that specific groups of workers were already given preferential treatment.

The two heads of state clung to conflicting opinions on nuclear energy. The Czech Republic plans to add two units to both the Temelín and Dukovany power plant. Both sides referred to differences in opinion among good neighbours. Austria "decisively opposed nuclear energy", but this did not only affect Temelín but nuclear power in general, Faymann said. However, the two countries agreed that efforts to diversify energy supply had to be intensified, giving the planned Nabucco pipeline and renewable energies as examples. ■

Humanitarian emergency aid for Gaza

Austria pledged its commitment to humanitarian emergency aid for the Palestinians in Gaza. Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger informed in Brussels on 26 January 2009 that the Austria Development Agency (ADA) had been instructed to grant 300,000 euros for food and medical goods, which will be distributed by the Red Cross. ■

Government: international rescue package for Eastern European banks

In view of the international economic and financial crisis as well as Austria's heavy investments in Eastern Europe, the federal government announced an initiative for an aid package for the region. No concrete amounts were mentioned by Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann and Vice-Chancellor Josef Pröll after the Council of Ministers on 27 January 2009.

Austrian enterprises are among the largest investors in Eastern and South Eastern Europe. Some Austrian banks are even market leaders, having made a major contribution to economic growth in Austria during the boom. The current crisis has adverse effects on the economic equilibrium in many reform countries – and severe repercussions on the Austrian economy. Domestic banks extended loans amounting to about 300 billion euros in Eastern Europe. The government leaders argued that therefore Austrian banks would benefit from stabilising these countries.

“In the good times we profited from Austria having become a hub for economic relations with Eastern Europe“, Faymann stressed. In many key areas Austria's economic data were better than those of other EU countries, which was especially due to the dynamic development of Austrian exports to this region and the banks promoting this trend through their commitment, Faymann stated. In periods of economic recession Austria had to take the initiative. Together with other EU Member States and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), support was to be given to the individual countries of this region. This concern also motivated Faymann's first official visits to Berlin and Prague (see Europe/International), where he advocated a European/international initiative involving the European Central Bank, the European Investment Bank and the Cohesion Fund. Minister of Finance Pröll will rally support for this idea among his European counterparts. According to Faymann, only individual countries such as Romania, Bulgaria or Ukraine required this special support.

The federal government's initiative covers three subjects. Besides establishing the above-mentioned national bank rescue systems for Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine, an alliance of the countries with the largest investments in the region – Austria, Germany, Belgium, France and Italy – is to be formed. Thirdly, the International

Monetary Fund and the World Bank – flanked by the EU (e.g. Cohesion Fund) – should lend their support if necessary.

The European Commission has reacted sceptically to these plans, referring to existing initiatives. Those countries were responsible whose banks had bought other banks in that region. ■

Budget deficit 2008 lower than expected

Based on the preliminary implementation of the budget 2008, the overall state deficit was only 0.3% of the GDP (about 1 billion euros) instead of the projected 0.7%. The reason were the good economic situation and the higher tax yield of a total of 68.5 billion euros. Due to the bank rescue package, the public debt climbed, however, to 62.5%, which is above the Maastricht limit of 60% of the GDP. ■

Increasing unemployment

Unemployment has increased significantly in Austria. At the end of January 2009 301,529 persons were registered as jobless, i.e. 32,777 persons or 12.2% more than in the previous month. With a 22.9% rise in unemployment, young people were affected most severely by this trend. Men's unemployment went up by 15.6%, women recorded a plus of 6.2%. The countrywide unemployment rate stood at 8.3% at the end of January (national statistics), the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs informed on 2 February 2009. The number of training programme participants increased by 2.2% to 53,517.

At the same time, however, a new employment record was registered. The number of persons employed reached an all-time high of 3.343 million people. This corresponds to an increase of 10,000 or 0.3% compared to the same period of the previous year. ■

Tourism 2008: plus 4.2 percent hotel nights

The year 2008 ended with a hefty plus for the Austrian tourist industry. With a total of 126.6 million hotel nights, the statistics of overnight stays recorded a marked increase of 4.3%. According to the Austrian Statistical Office (Statistik Austria), this has been the best result since the 1990s. ■

Götz Spielmann's film "Revanche" nominated for an Oscar

The drama movie "Revanche" by Austrian filmmaker Götz Spielmann, 48, competes for the Oscar for the Best Foreign Language Film in Hollywood. The nomination of this Austrian film is already celebrated as a sensation internationally as Stefan Ruzowitzky's concentration camp drama "Die Fälscher" ("The Counterfeiters") had won the Oscar for the Best Foreign Language Film only last year.

Spielmann's film faces tough competition from other nominees such as "The Baader-Meinhof Complex" (Germany), the Cannes winner "The Class" (France), the favoured film "Departures" (Japan) and "Waltz With Bashir" (Israel). Götz Spielmann's "Revanche" does not have a "moral" story either, which is usually appreciated by the Oscar jury.

In "Revanche" the prostitute Tamara (Irina Potapenko) and her boyfriend Alex (Johannes Krisch) try to build a new life outside the sex scene. In parallel rural policeman Robert (Andreas Lust) and his wife Susanne (Ursula Strauss) want to start a family. The quartet meets at the wrong moment. Tamara dies, Alex wants revenge. The gripping feature film turns the spotlight on the milieu of petty crime and prostitution in Vienna and on provincial life in the Austrian countryside.

Götz Spielmann was born in Wels (Upper Austria) in 1961 and grew up in Vienna. He started to write and direct already at school. Spielmann's first film was shown on the Austrian TV even before he took his school-leaving exam in 1978. At the Vienna Film Academy he became a student of Harald Zusanek and Axel Corti. He earned his diploma in 1987 with a thesis titled "Vergiss Sneider!", for which he was awarded the special prize of the Max Ophüls Festival in 1988. Spielmann then started to work as a scriptwriter and director in the film and TV industry. At the Berlinale Festival in 1995 his film "Die Angst vor der Idylle" was shown. In 1999 he continued his work with "Die Fremde", which had already been entered for an Oscar just like the relationship drama "Antares" (with Petra Morzé, Andreas Patton). Between these two works, he produced the film adaptation of Arthur Schnitzler's "Spiel im Morgengrauen" ("Night Games") with Fritz Karl, Birgit Minichmayr, Karlheinz Hackl and Nina Proll. He had made his debut as a stage director with Schnitzler's "Der einsame Weg"

("The Lonely Way") in 2005. His play "Imperium" ("Empire") was premiered at Kammerspiele in Linz in 2006. In the same year he received the Upper Austrian Prize for Culture in the category film and founded the film production company "Spielmannfilm", with which he developed "Revanche".

Minister of Culture Schmied was "highly pleased" about the Oscar nomination on 22 January 2009: "After the huge success of Ruzowitzky's 'Die Fälscher' ('The Counterfeiters') last year, the nomination of 'Revanche' is another proof of the excellent quality of Austrian film-making. The nomination encourages me to step up financial support for the creative potential of our filmmakers". The Oscar nomination also strengthened Austria's presence in the film industry.

"Revanche" has already been released on DVD. The book of the film was edited by Andreas Ungerböck and published by substance media; 192 pages, 14.90 euros, ISBN 978-3-9502639-0-9. A special DVD/book edition is offered in the film magazine "ray". ■

Olga Neuwirth's opera "Lost Highway" won award in London

The opera "Lost Highway" has won an award in London. Based on the film by David Lynch, the work was composed by Austrian Olga Neuwirth, 40, in 2003. The production of the English National Opera (ENO) at the Young Vic (directed by Diane Paulus and conducted by Baldus Brönnimann) received the "South Bank Show Award" in the category opera – together with a new production of Harrison Birtwistle's "Punch and Judy" directed by Daniel Kramer. The award ceremony held at Dorchester Hotel on 20 January 2009 was recorded and broadcast on the British channel ITV 1 on 28 January 2009.

On 8 February 2009 Neuwirth's new work will be premiered in Berlin – the music for Michael Glawogger's film adaptation of Josef Haslinger's novel "Das Vaterspiel" ("The Generation Game"). Olga Neuwirth was born in Graz in August 1968 and grew up in Schwanberg in western Styria. She comes from a musical family, her father Harald is a jazz pianist teaching at the Graz Art University (KUG), her uncle Gösta Neuwirth lives in Berlin as a composer and music researcher. Neuwirth herself was an aspiring trumpeter before a car crash, in which she lost her jaw bone. At the age of 15, she met Hans Werner Henze and started to show interest in composition at a youth music

workshop. There she also made the acquaintance of writer and music enthusiast Elfriede Jelinek ("The Piano Teacher"), with whom she has been realising numerous projects, e.g. "Der Wald" ("The Wood") in 1991 or "Bählamm's Fest" ("Feast of the Lamb") receiving its world premiere at the Vienna Festival in 1999. Other joint projects with the Literature Nobel Prize Laureate of 2004 have been planned. ■

Shamir's film "Defamation": Austria's contribution to Berlinale 2009

The Austrian-Danish-Israeli-American co-production "Defamation" of Israeli director Yoav Shamir is the only documentary nominated as Austrian contribution at this year's Berlinale – the international forum for young filmmakers. It will be screened at different cinemas in Berlin from 5 to 10 February 2009, then at the international documentary film festival Cinéma du Réel, at the Paris-based Centre Pompidou from 5 to 15 March 2009 and at the 2009 Diagonale festival in Graz from 17 to 22 March 2009.

The film addresses the question what anti-Semitism means today, two generations after the Holocaust. In his journey Yoav Shamir explores modern manifestations of the "oldest hatred" and finds alarming answers, e.g. in European capitals, at a commemorative trip of Israeli pupils to Auschwitz.

"Defamation" also provides insights into the reactions of Jews to anti-Semitism, for example in New York, Moscow or Tel Aviv. The film was funded by the Austrian Film Institute, ORF FILM-TV Agreement, the National Fund for NS victims and the Future Fund of the Republic of Austria, the Federal Ministry of Education, Art and Culture and Knut.Ogris.Films.

www.defamation-the-film.com ■

Eysoldt Ring: important award for Klaus Maria Brandauer

Austrian actor Klaus Maria Brandauer is awarded the Eysoldt Ring 2008. This was announced by the German Academy of Performing Arts in Bensheim (Hessen/Germany) on 24 January 2009. The award, which has been granted every year since 1986, was named after actress Gertrud Eysoldt (1870-1955) and is financed through the trust of theatre critic Wilhelm Ringelband, who died in Bensheim. Among the previous prize

winners are Corinna Harfouch, Tobias Moretti and Nina Hoss.

Brandauer receives the theatre prize for his brilliant interpretation of the village judge Adam in Heinrich von Kleist's "Der zerbrochene Krug" ("The Broken Jug") directed by Peter Stein at Berliner Ensemble. The award ceremony will be staged on 28 March 2009. The jury around Peter Iden praised Brandauer as an "actor of the old school" with "technical skills, virtuosity and creativity" found only rarely on the German stage and pointed out that Klaus Maria Brandauer – born in Bad Aussee (Styria) in 1943 – had also earned himself an international reputation as a Hollywood actor.

Outstanding films with Brandauer, who was triumphing at Vienna's Burgtheater for many years, are for example "Mephisto" (1981), for which Hungarian director István Szabó won the Oscar for the Best Foreign Language Film; Sydney Pollack's "Out of Africa" (1985), with Meryl Streep and Robert Redford; "The Russia House" (1990) with Sean Connery and Michelle Pfeiffer; as well as Fritz Lehner's "Jedermann's Fest" (2002). Brandauer impressed also as a director/actor, e.g. in "Georg Elser – Einer aus Deutschland" (1989) or "Mario und der Zauberer" (1994). ■

European Union: Austria is moving up in innovation ranking

Austria has moved up in an international innovation comparison, now ranking sixth in the EU. This is the result of the "European Innovation Scoreboard 2008" presented in Brussels on 22 January 2009 by EU Industry Commissioner Günter Verheugen. While one year ago Austria had been placed eighth in the EU ranking, it now leads the group of Innovation Followers (before Ireland and Luxembourg), coming directly after the Innovation Leaders – Sweden, Finland, Germany, Denmark and Great Britain. The non-EU member Switzerland is the number one in a global comparison.

The innovation gap of the EU vis-à-vis the USA and Japan has narrowed. After Ireland, Austria is the country with the fastest improvement rate in its group, Verheugen stated. 29 indicators are used as a basis for the Innovation Scoreboard prepared every year by the European Commission, e.g. the availability of labour with the necessary qualifications, data on research and development expenditure, patent applications,

innovation in enterprises and the supply with risk capital. International comparisons showed that the EU had improved in terms of availability of skilled workers, access to broadband networks and risk capital. Weaknesses were still identified regarding investments by enterprises, where the European Union was dropping behind the USA and Japan, research and development expenditure as well as innovation technology.

As the European Commission informed, innovation in Austria had been driven by human resources thanks to the increase in the number of graduates in engineering and natural sciences.

Although data of the current financial and economic crisis had been included in the analysis for the "European Innovation Scoreboard", it was still possible to identify trends. Due to progress made in the past, European enterprises were in a better position to counter the crisis through innovation, the Commission stated. ■

Haydn's last years: new permanent exhibition at Vienna's Haydn House

Joseph Haydn bought the house in Gumpendorf (then still on the outskirts of Vienna) between two trips to England. After having added another floor, he went to live there in 1797, when he was 65 years old. The Haydn House was the home to the composer for the last twelve years of his life. It was there, too, that he died on 31 May 1809 – 200 years ago. At Haydn House he created his most important late works, e.g. the oratorios "The Creation" (1796-98) and "The Seasons" (1799-1801), and experienced one of the artistically most fruitful periods of his life – ending in complete exhaustion. On his last visiting card he had a melody printed, composed by him: "Fled forever is my strength, old and weak am I".

The exhibits include copies of the notes, which he had framed and hung in his bedroom as well as the "honours and distinctions stuff" – medals, documents, gifts, which Europe's most famous composer at the time had received from the political and cultural elite and presented proudly to his guests. As far as Haydn's musical instruments are concerned, his fortepiano and his clavichord are highlights of the permanent exhibition. The clavichord had been acquired by his ardent admirer Johannes Brahms, to whom a memorial room is dedicated in the Haydn House. The typical garden of the Biedermeier époque is recreated by the Municipal Department for Parks and Gardens (MA42) and can be admired from

May onwards. The Haydn House (Haydngasse 19, 1060 Vienna) was bought by the City of Vienna in 1904. It is Vienna's oldest musician's home turned into a museum. www.wienmuseum.at ■

Minister Claudia Schmied fights for more investments in education

Together with head of the Economic Research Institute (Wifo) Karl Aiginger, Minister of Education Claudia Schmied presented a study authored by Julia Bock-Schappelwein on the importance of education in the economic crisis. "Those who manage to improve their position during the crisis will be successful also after the crisis", the Wifo head said.

According to the author of the study, in 2008 the average unemployment rate of people who only completed compulsory education stood at 14%, whereas the unemployment rate of university graduates was merely 1.9%. Since 1995 the number of employees with completed university studies has risen by about 80%; in the same period the number of workers with compulsory school attendance as the highest educational attainment has decreased by one fifth. This group earns 34% less than persons with completed secondary education (A-level exam, apprenticeship) in Austria. The income of university graduates is 57% higher than that of persons with completed secondary education.

Schmied concluded: "Completed lower secondary education is no longer an adequate basis for success in life". Therefore she appealed to all "to attach great importance to young people's good education and training". Every government aware of the future had to invest in education in the present. This policy would have direct economic effects such as jobs for teachers or, in case of infrastructure projects, on the building sector. But above all long-term strategic effects could be expected, which did not only safeguard a country's wealth and status as a business location but also had to form part of the innovation strategy. This is the perspective from which Schmied views the infrastructure investments of 1.7 billion euros the government plans to allocate to education (600 million euros in the years 2009 and 2010). In addition, every year at least 400 million euros are to be invested through different educational policy measures. Minister of Education Schmied was "very confident" that budget allocations would be made for these projects despite the economic crisis. ■

Sport came under the purview of Federal Minister Darabos

On 27 January 2009 the Federal Council passed the Federal Ministries Act approved by the National Council one week earlier with the votes of the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) and the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP). The opposition had voted against it. By virtue of this resolution, the ministries will partly have new tasks with effect 1 February 2009. Responsibilities for "labour" were transferred from the Economic Ministry to the Ministry of Social Affairs. Family and youth affairs previously falling with the competence of the Health Ministry (headed by a SPÖ minister) are managed by the Secretariat of State within the Ministry of Economy (led by the ÖVP). The Ministry of Science is now solely responsible for the fund promoting academic research (this competence had been shared with the Ministry of Infrastructure).

The responsibilities for sport are transferred from the Federal Chancellery to the Ministry of Defence led by Minister Norbert Darabos. ■

Austria sends large team to Special Olympics in Boise

Austria is represented at the Special Olympics from 7 to 13 February 2009 in Boise (Idaho/USA) with a total of 73 athletes. The athletes competing under the red-white-red flag come from all over Austria (except Burgenland), with Salzburg contributing most team members (19). 24 coaches accompany the Austrian participants to the USA. The organisers expect about 2,500 athletes from 100 nations.

A budget of 210,000 euros has been made available to the Austrian delegation by the Republic, the Länder, private companies and sponsors. ■

US swimming stars Mark Spitz and Aaron Peirsol pay visit to Austria

"Sport and Economy" is not only an important and future-oriented topic in Austria. In recognition of this fact, the organisers of the international conference "Com.sult 09" for managers of the consulting sector devoted a special programme section to this subject. The event staged in Vienna on 26/27 January 2009 attracted great international attention, which was certainly also due to the fact that numerous sports heroes participated

in "Sports and Economy", e.g. legendary US swimmers Mark Spitz and Aaron Peirsol, Austria's skiing hero Karl Schranz, ski jumper and successful ski jumping coach Toni Innauer and Austria's currently most successful swimmer Mirna Jukic, who won several European Swimming Championships and Olympic medals, and her brother Dinko Jukic, recent European champion. For fledgling Austrian swimmers the visit of Spitz und Peirsol to the Wien Südstadt elite sports centre was a great honour and unforgettable experience. Five-time Olympic medallist Peirsol even jumped into the pool, swimming in the 4 x 50m relay and 50m backstroke. ■

Football: sports icon Karl Koller died

Karl Koller, one of the great Austrian football celebrities, passed away on 24 January 2009. The footballer having participated in 86 international matches of the national team died of Alzheimer's disease shortly before his 80th birthday on 9 February 2009. With Gerhard Hanappi and Ernst Ocwirk, he had formed the perfect midfield partnership in the national team in the 1950s and 1960s. His greatest success was the third place at the World Cup in Switzerland in 1954.

He is among the kickers with the most caps for the team of the Austrian Football Federation (ÖFB) – behind Andreas Herzog (103 matches), Toni Polster (95) and Gerhard Hanappi (93). Aged 20, the man from Lower Austria changed from ASK Blumau to the football club Vienna, for which he played till the end of his career. He participated in 836 matches for the club from Döbling, scoring 101 goals. In 1955 he won the Austrian Cup for the club of his life. In 2004 he was elected best Vienna footballer of all times.

The exemplary athlete made his debut in the national team – as a tough but always fair midfielder – with a 2:0 victory against Belgium in Vienna in March 1952 and ended his career with the World Cup qualification match against Hungary in September 1965. His career highlight was the World Cup bronze medal in 1954, with the noteworthy 7:5 victory in the quarter finals against Switzerland in Lausanne. Thanks to Karl Koller's mental strength and brilliant technique, the Austrian team caught up after facing 0:3. Under coach Karl Decker, he was the pillar of a team which won over Spain, Italy, the USSR (in Vienna and Moscow) and against England.

After the end of his career, Karl Koller ran a restaurant in Blumau for many years. ■