NEWS FROM AUSTRIA



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HOME AFFAIRS ■ **EUROPE**

Government: the first 100 days

The first 100 days of the new coalition formed by the Socialist Party (SPÖ) and the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) – led by Chancellor Werner Faymann – were under the impact of the global economic and financial crisis. (The government had been sworn in on 2 December 2008.) Looking back on this period after the Council of Ministers on 10 March 2009, the Chancellor praised the "team spirit" of the coalition. This was an ideal basis for taking crucial decisions and implementing them. In this context, Faymann stressed that the 100-billion-euro "protective shield" for banks was not a gift but subject to requirements. In case a bank became insolvent, the state would acquire shares in it, and this meant nationalisation. "I am glad that this does not happen every day in Austria", stated Faymann. Austria was prepared for the crisis.

With a debt ratio of 62.3%, Austria's position was significantly better than that of the EU average and the euro-zone. The unemployment rate was the second lowest after the Netherlands, and the same was true for youth unemployment. However, every jobless person was one too many, said Faymann. The economic stimulus packages therefore also included an additional billion for labour market policy. If necessary, further measures could be taken to revive the economy. The stability criteria were met. "Austria is doing fine. The Triple-A rating has been confirmed recently. "It is counterproductive to paint a gloomy picture of the economy", the Chancellor stressed. Austria's banks were very active in Eastern Europe, therefore Austria advocated a rescue package tailored to their needs in the EU. Regarding the current conflict between Minister

Regarding the current conflict between Minister of Education Claudia Schmied and teachers as their hours of work are to be increased by two per week, Faymann pledged his full support to Schmied. It was vital to give fresh impetus to education, especially in times of crisis, while taking the necessary austerity measures.

During the government's first 100 days the following projects have been realised or initiated: the tax reform with a tax relief volume of 3.3 billion euros; the biennial budget 2009/2010 (talks concluded, but no details known; financial restructuring of insurance institutions (injecting 100 million euros/year into the health insurance institutions provided that they cut internal costs); two economic stimulus packages (for enterprises and jobs) and a bank aid package (100 billion

euros for stabilising savings deposits and mobilising the credit sector); new regulations governing the right of abode of immigrants. ■

National Council 1: tax reform entails tax relief of 3.3 billion euros

On 11 March 2009 the National Council adopted the tax reform with a majority of votes of the governing factions, i.e. the Social Democrats (SPÖ) and the People's Party (ÖVP). For tax-payers this means a tax relief of 3.3 billion euros. The tax reform will enter into force with retroactive effect from 1 January 2009.

The core of the package is a significant wage tax reduction. Substantial tax relief is granted to families and entrepreneurs. Tax deductions for donations and church membership fees are increased. Vice-Chancellor Finance Minister Josef Pröll described the package as the largest tax relief ever seen in Austria as every individual would save between 420 to 670 euros; for families the tax cut corresponded to a 15th monthly wage. Adding the economic stimulus packages, the total volume of measures amounted to 6 billion euros. Hence, Austria was among the European countries leading in this area, stated Pröll.

Parliament also adopted the eco-premium (for scrapping old cars) of 1,500 euros. ■

National Council 2: residence permit and victims' protection

The National Council also gave the green light for reforming the right of abode for humanitarian reasons. Immigrants having arrived in Austria before 1 May 2004 may apply for a residence permit on humanitarian grounds.

Moreover, measures protecting the victims of violence in Austria are improved. The second Act on the Protection of Victims of Violence provides for the comprehensive protection of the victims of criminal offences (if abuse continues this is considered a new offence), stricter court checks and tougher rules for sexual offenders.

Ban on cultivating GE maize

Austria scored a success in Brussels: the cultivation of the genetically-engineered (GE) Mon810 and T25 maize types remains forbidden. This was approved by a clear majority of EU ministers of the environment on 2 March 2009. ■

EUROPE INTERNATIONAL

Federal President Fischer pays state visit to Lithuania

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President Heinz Fischer paid a state visit to Lithuania from 11 to 13 March 2009. This was the first state visit of an Austrian president to the southernmost country of the Baltic region. Items on the agenda were talks with his counterpart Valdas Adamkus and Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius. Fischer was accompanied by a trade delegation and the manager of Linz09 Martin Heller. Linz (Upper Austria) and Lithuania's capital Vilnius are European Capitals of Culture 2009.

Besides the current financial and economic crisis, key topics of discussion were the bilateral economic relations, energy and culture as well as the relations between the EU and Russia. A critical dialogue of the EU with Moscow would not be blocked, was the message of his hosts to Fischer. The bilateral relations were described by both sides as "very good and trustful". The two countries also shared common positions with regard to European policy, e.g. the Lisbon Treaty and the joint efforts to tackle the economic crisis, Fischer said.

Just like the other "Baltic tiger countries" Latvia and Estonia, Lithuania had drifted into recession after years of fast economic growth. Compared to Latvia, where a minus of 15 to 20% was likely, the situation was not so bad, explained President Adamkus after his talks with Fischer. The largest Baltic country had currency reserves of 4.1 billion euros and the most balanced economic structure of the Baltic region.

The Austrian company representatives explored above all opportunities in sectors involving alternative energies and energy efficiency. According to Adamkus, these were business areas that were of increasing importance in Lithuania so as to reduce its "dependence on international energy suppliers". In concrete terms, Russia was meant, to whose networks Lithuania is connected. The Ignalina nuclear power plant currently meets 70% of the Lithuanian electricity demand. Based on an agreement with the EU, it will be shut down at the end of 2009.

EU Commission President Barroso meets with Chancellor Faymann

EU Commission President José Manuel Barroso met with Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann in Vienna on 6 March 2009. Deliberations focused inter alia on the economic crisis, including the situation in Eastern Europe as well as the cultivation of genetically-engineered (GE) maize. Barroso emphasised vis-à-vis reporters that the European Commission neither supported nor opposed genetically-engineered plants in principle. After the ministers of the environment gave their consent to Austria's ban on GE maize, the situation was examined.

In view of the economic and financial crisis, the Commission President stressed the EU's solidarity with the Eastern European countries. However, no "general package" would be adopted but decisions would be taken on a case-by-case basis. He thanked Austria for its initiative to focus attention on this issue, said Barroso.

Federal Chancellor Faymann pays his first official visit to Hungary

Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann paid a short first official visit to Hungary on 5 March 2009. In Budapest Faymann and his Hungarian counterpart Ferenc Gyurcsany called for a "global response to a global crisis". Those countries which required support should be enabled to resort to instruments of financial support and stabilisation, said Faymann. The social idea of a common Europe had be upheld also in difficult times. Both sides hailed the "highly friendly relations" of the two neighbouring countries. The joint government meetings will be continued.

EU Parliament voted for increased toll for lorries – success for Austria

Austria has achieved an interim success in its battle for increasing the road toll for lorries. With a clear majority, the European Parliament voted in favour of adding external expenses such as noise, congestion and air pollution to the road toll for lorries. The proposed legal act still requires the consent of the EU Member States.

Austrian Inzko is new international envoy for Bosnia

The Austrian Valentin Inzko, currently ambassador to Slovenia, was appointed officially as the international community's new envoy in Bosnia. Inzko is the second Austrian becoming High Representative in Sarajevo, succeeding to Ambassador Wolfgang Petritsch. ■

ECONOMY

Austria, Switzerland and Luxembourg ease banking secrecy

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The strict banking secrecy rules cannot be upheld in Europe. Under the growing pressure of the international community, Austria, Switzerland and Luxembourg eased their strict banking secrecy rules on 13 March 2009. One day earlier Liechtenstein and Andorra had announced to relax their banking secrecy rules and to intensify bank data sharing. Subsequently, also Monaco stated to be willing to improve cooperation in the combat against tax evasion based on international criteria. These measures have been prompted by the forthcoming G-20 meeting in London on 2 April 2009, where all the countries not abiding by the OECD standards and the EU Savings Tax Directive will be threatened with being blacklisted.

In the future, Austria would exchange information on bank accounts if a foreign authority could "substantiate the suspicion" of a tax offence even if no criminal proceedings were pending. However, the suspicion had to be well documented, explained Minister of Finance Josef Pröll in Vienna on 13 March 2009. The criterion to be applied in the future was that the administrative offence could lead to financial criminal proceedings even if the legal situation abroad was different. Pröll explained that the concrete details should be laid down in double taxation agreements. Up to now bank accounts had been opened only in criminal proceedings.

The Minister of Finance assumes that the Austrian banking secrecy rules will remain unchanged. There was no need to amend Section 38 of the Banking Act (Bankwesengesetz/BWG), which has constitutional status.

Austrian increased exports by 2.3 percent in 2008

In 2008 Austria's exports increased by 2.3% year on year to 117.3 billion euros, while imports grew by 4.3% to 119.1 billion euros. This has resulted in a passive trade balance of 1.8 billion euros, after a minor surplus of 0.4 billion euros had been registered in the year 2007. These figures are based on the preliminary data for 2008 published by the Austrian Statistical Office (Statistik Austria) on 9 March 2009.

In November and December 2008, the global economic crisis started to impact Austria's foreign trade. Exports dropped by 9% to 7.6 billion euros,

imports by 5.4% to 8.3 billion euros (compared to December 2007). In November 2008 the decline from the level of 2007 was even more drastic: exports shrank by 14.3%, imports by 7.5%.

Both the imports and exports of the product group which is most important for Austria's foreign trade, i.e. "machinery and vehicles", including car components, registered a 2% decrease during the year 2008. President of the Economic Chamber Austria (WKÖ) Christoph Leitl expects 2009 to be a "tough year for exports". ■

Mail Service: 2008 ends with plus in sales and profit

Despite the economic crisis, the Austrian Mail Service (Post AG) looks back on a positive financial year 2008. The stock listed and partially nationalised enterprise boosted its earnings before interest and tax (EBIT) by 4.1% to 169.5 million euros. Sales grew by 5.4% to 2.441 billion euros, while the earnings per share declined by 2.3% to 1.71 euros. The equity ratio remains at a remarkable level of 40%. The financial key data of Post AG surpass the expectations of the analysts who had predicted an 0.1% plus of the EBIT and an increase in sales by 4.7%.

In 2008 the headcount of the mail service group rose on annual average by 25,764 employees to 27,002 (from the level of 2007). The increase was entirely attributable to the acquisition of subsidiaries, informed Post AG.

As in the past year, the distribution of a special dividend amounting to 1 euro per share in addition to the basic dividend of 1.50 euros per share is to be proposed at the annual general meeting of shareholders on 6 May 2009. Stable sales and EBIT on the level of 2008 are expected for 2009.

Even the number of branch offices grew substantially. But the controversial plan of closing down 300 of 1,300 post offices will not be abandoned. Small local shops are searched for to take over mail services (convenience stores, pharmacies).

AUA registers high losses in 2008

Austrian Airlines (AUA) concluded its last financial year before the take-over by Lufthansa with a net loss of 429.5 million euros. This is the most significant minus since the foundation of the air carrier 50 years ago. The reasons are the economic crisis, fuel costs, impairment of air planes and competition from discount airlines.

CULTURE ■ **MEDIA** ■ **SCIENCE**

Louvre presents first Waldmüller retrospective in France

He left about 1200 paintings and advocated for open-air painting. The Louvre in Paris devotes the first solo-exhibition in France to the Austrian painter of the Biedermeier epoch, Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller (1793-1865). The retrospective (ending on 18 May 2009) presents about 40 portraits, landscapes, still lifes and genre paintings, which come mainly from the large collection of the Belvedere Museum in Vienna, where a more comprehensive version of the show – with about 100 paintings – will be displayed from 9 June to 11 October 2009.

www.louvre.fr ■

Arnold Schönberg - Who I am

The Vienna-based Arnold Schönberg Center (3rd district of Vienna, Schwarzenbergplatz 6) presents a multi-media exhibition about the composer (1874-1951) running until year-end. What makes "Who I am" so special is the fact that the exhibits are directly related to the life of Schönberg. The show was designed by Nuria Schönberg Nono, the daughter of the composer and the widow of Luigi Nono.

The exhibition presents, for example, his study in Los Angeles with the original furniture, including designed by himself. Moreover. Schönberg's living room in L.A., where the family often listed to classical music on the radio and read the pertinent scores - one of the "most beautiful memories" of Nuria - was reconstructed for the show. Numerous copies of notebooks and manuscripts are available for inspection to the visitors. Highly interesting paintings by Schönberg himself and a recording device Schönberg used still before the invention of the tape recorder, are also on display.

The audiovisual highlight of the show – the music-video room – offers top quality listening samples – with excerpts from Pierrot lunaire op. 21. www.schoenberg.at ■

Albertina: The Age of Rembrandt

Vienna Albertina (Bastion Hall) presents "The Age of Rembrandt" (closing in 21 June 2009). Two rooms are reserved for the work created between 1626 and 1660 by Rembrandt van Rijn after whom the show is named. He created no less

than 85 self-portraits, experimented with Biblical, animal and social themes.

Besides the genius, about 70 Dutch artists are presented. All of them are excellent, albeit not as famous. The approximately 150 works of different techniques (drawings, etchings, prints) and about 40 oil paintings come from the Albertina's own collection. www.albertina.at

Vienna's architecture around 1900 presented in Iran

Recently Austria's new touring exhibition "Architecture in Vienna around 1900" was presented in the city of Shiraz in central Iran. The show will move on to the island of Kish in the Persian Gulf as well as to the cities of Tabriz, Chabahar, Teheran and Isfahan.

The exhibition presents photos of buildings by Otto Wagner, Joseph Maria Olbrich, Josef Hoffmann, Max Fabiani and Leopold Bauer.

The Austrian embassy in Teheran does not only organise music, science and sports events but also promotes cultural exchange through exhibitions. At present also an exhibition on the Austrian Peace Nobel Prize laureate Bertha von Suttner can be visited in Teheran. In the framework of its 50th anniversary celebrations, the Austrian Cultural Forum also plans several concerts and a one-week festival. www.bmeia.gv.at/teheran ■

Austrian State Prize for Cultural Journalism 2008 to Robert Misik

Minister of Culture Claudia Schmied conferred the Austrian State Prize for Cultural Journalism 2008 on journalist and writer Robert Misik on 3 March 2009. Franz Schuh held the presentation speech at the ceremony in the Palais of Lower Austria in Vienna.

Robert Misik (born in 1966) works on a regular basis for the German daily taz as well as Standard, profil und Falter published in Austria. He has his own video-blog on the website of the daily Standard. One of his main interests is the critical examination of globalisation but he also focuses on consumer culture and the increase in cultural aspects in the production of goods. He participates actively in political debates and is in charge of a series of events at the Bruno Kreisky Forum of International Dialogue. Among his excellent books are "Genial dagegen" (2005) and "Glanz und Elend der Kommerzkultur" (2007).

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His latest work (published in 2009) is "Politik der Paranoia. Gegen die neuen Konservativen" ("Politics against Paranoia. Against the New Conservatives").

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Schmied praised the State Prize winner as an author "who knows how to familiarise the reader with complex, social, political and economic contexts without simplifying or seeing the issues in black and white". The Austrian State Prize for Cultural Journalism is granted every second year, alternating with the Austrian State Prize for Literary Criticism. It is conferred on personalities standing out for their excellent contributions. Previous prize winners include Franz Schuh, Daniela Striegl, Karl-Markus Gauß, Konrad Paul Liessmann, Robert Menasse, Adolf Holl, Peter Huemer and Paul Lendvai. www.misik.at ■

Spots of Light - to be a woman in the Holocaust

Under the aegis of Federal President Heinz Fischer the international exhibition "Spots of Light – to be a woman in the Holocaust", curated by Yehudit Inbar of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, is shown at Vienna's Nestroyhof Theatre Hamakom (2nd district of Vienna, Nestroyplatz 1) from 1 April to 31 May 2009.

Jewish women in the Holocaust applied their minds to a place that threatened to deprive them of their minds, brought strength to a place where they had no strength, where they marched all the way to death and invested every additional moment of life with meaning.

The exhibition "Light Spots" tries to present the human history hidden behind the historical facts and to create space for the unique voice of women based on 45 stories. The visitor should always bear in mind that in these events and incidents the abyss of evil reached unparalleled dimensions. More than 3 million women and girls were killed in the Holocaust. The NS ideology called for the annihilation of the entire Jewish "race". Women endowed with fertility were a main target of persecution. The 45 stories of women encompass subjects like love, motherhood, caring for others, life as a partisan, every-day life, friendship, religion, food and art.

Outstanding films (e.g. by Anja Salomanowitz, Yaron Silberman and Michael Deutsch) are screened in the accompanying programme, presenting different fates of Jewish women surviving the Holocaust.

The show is supported by the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of the Holocaust and the Future of the Republic of Austria, the Federal Ministry of Education, Art and Culture, the Municipal Department 7 (Vienna Culture), the Municipal Department 57 (Women), the Federal Ministry for European and international affairs, Wiener Donauraum/Central Danube GmbH., Saint-Gabain Rigips Austria GesmbH.. the administrative heads of the second district of Vienna and the art insurance company Barta & Partner. ■

Klagenfurt: Claudio Monteverdi's "L'Incoronazione di Poppea"

"Omnia vincit Amor" - "Love Conquers All", said Virgil, certainly with an ambiguous undertone. This principle can be examined in Claudio Monteverdi's opera "L'Incoronazione di Poppea", which had received its world premiere in Venice in 1642. Before the married Emperor Nero can legalise his love affair with Poppea, who is married to the Roman Praetor Ottone, by putting the crown ceremoniously on her head and the story authored by advocate Giovanni Francesco Busenello (1598-1659) comes to its "happy end", several people have to be liquidated. The wicked drama, brilliantly stated by Laurent Laffargue at Stadttheater Klagenfurt, is of topical interest. It is sung (in Italian) and played fabulously, e.g. by Julia Hajnóczy, Anna Quintans, Sylvia Rieser, Gabor Bretz, Juan Carlos Falcón. The luxury clothes are contemporary, and this makes sense. The music is by the members of the Symphony Orchestra of Carinthia (Kärntner Sinfonieorchester). Up to 28 April 2009. Not to be missed! www.stadttheater-klagenfurt.at

Diagonale Film Festival 09 in Graz

The Austrian Diagonale Film Festival – with Barbara Pichler's giving her debut as the festival's manager – presents a total of 237 films and videos in four cinemas in Graz from 17 to 22 March 2009. The programme also includes "specials" featuring Mara Mattuschka and Stefan Krohmer. The festival in the Helmut List Halle is opened with Marco Antoniazzi's "Kleine Fische" ("Small Fish"). Moreover, an exhibition of Dariusz Kowalski ("Interrogation Room"), the creator of this year's Diagonale trailer, is mounted.

CULTURE ■ **MEDIA** ■ **SCIENCE**

500 films had been entered for the festival, with a strong trend towards documentaries. Michael Glawogger's feature film "Contact High" will be premiered. Other films shown are "Schottentor" by Caspar Pfaundler and "Rimini" by Peter Jaitz, where two men who have little in common face a turning point in their lives. One of the most outstanding documentaries is "Gangster Girls" by Tina Leisch, describing every-day life in a women's prison. Another world premiere is "Cash & Marry" by Atanas Georgiev. Young men from Macedonia come with a student's visa to Austria to buy a bride and get a work permit through a marriage of convenience.

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In the framework of a retrospective, the festival also presents films like Robert Dornhelm's "La Bohème" (starring Anna Netrebko and Rolando Villazón), Kurt Ockermüller's "Echte Wiener – Die Sackbauer Saga" ("True Viennese - The Sackbauer family saga") and the children's film "Hexe Lilli" ("Witch Lilli") by Oscar Prize winner Stefan Ružowitzky, which are shown successfully in the cinema. www.diagonale.at

Exhibition about Fred Adlmüller

Vienna University of Applied Arts presents a comprehensive show about fashion designer, stage and film designer Fred Adlmüller (1909-1989) to mark his 100th birthday. Precious original models and objects produced by his fashion house as well as works by Adlmüller's students now owned by the Costume and Fashion Collection of the University can be admired at the exhibition venue Heiligenkreuzer Hof up to 30 April 2009. Among Adlmüller's customers were not only

Empress Soraya, Grace Kelly, Ingrid Bergman, but also Austrian presidents like Franz Jonas appeared in tailcoats created by the professional cook, who had worked on his first haute couture collection in 1934. Adlmüller won the Grand Prix medal at the World Exhibition in Brussels in 1958 for suites of hostesses integrating elements of the Austrian national costume, outshining Christian Dior.

Shortly before his death, the couturier sold his shop in Kärntner Straße in the centre of Vienna to the company Palmers. The proceeds from the sale were invested in a foundation. The income from interest is used to finance scholarships between 5000 and 6000 euros for six students of the university fashion course per year. In this way the designer was immortalised as a visionary patron.

www.dieangewandte.at

Kunsthalle Krems presents Otto Dix

Under the title "Otto Dix. Between Paradise and Collapse", Kunsthalle stages an exhibition about one of the most important German artists of the first half of the 20th century to commemorate the 40th anniversary of his death. Dix (1891-1969) translated the horrible events of WWI. into a drastic pictorial language. His socio-critical paintings address the political and social situation up to the period after WWII. Otto Dix was considered a "degenerate artist" during the Nazi regime.

The fascinating exhibition in Krems highlights the great diversity of his oeuvre, even his less known late work. The project was realised in cooperation with the Otto Dix Foundation as well as numerous collections and loans from private collections. www.kunsthalle.at ■

Vienna Kunsthalle and Vienna Museum: photos of the abyss of the human species

Photo exhibitions are on show in two museums in close vicinity to one another – Vienna Kunsthalle and Vienna Museum Karlsplatz (running until 3 May and 24 May 2009, respectively). They explore related themes. "Elevator to the Gallows" is the title of the first one, which is based on a film by Louis Malles. Miles Davis composed the film music in 1958 and drew his long, icy lines as a trumpeter. The show is set in an existentialist twilight zone, where lies and truth, crime and justice, sexual excess and bourgeois morals blur and reorganise into new social parallel universes. The exhibition is an attempt of the artist and curator from New York Banks Violette to explore the "complex noir" with its fatal seductive power across the genres of art (Violette, Weegee), literature (Dashiell Hammett), film (John Huston) and music (Davis).

The second exhibition - "New York Big City Street Photography" - features photo artists who tried to capture the constant changes of the US metropolis and its inhabitants since the 1940s involving love, lust, drama and created works echoing the gloomy poetry of every-day life.

150 photos by Diane Arbus, Bruce Davidson, Walker Evans to Weegee and Garry Winogrand are exhibited.

www.kunsthallewien.at; www.wienmuseumat

SPORTS POLICY

New Sporthilfe President Norbert Darabos advocates clean sport

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Minister of Sport Norbert Darabos was elected new President of Österreichische Sporthilfe (Austrian Sports Aid) at the organisation's annual general meeting in early March.

Upon entering into office, Darabos made an important step to important anti-doping policy. His proposal that athletes committing doping offences are to be barred for life from access to any type of support from Österreichische Sporthilfe was accepted unanimously by the managing board. "I take sides with clean athletes - and not with those gaining unfair advantage through doping. Doping offenders should not be eligible for funding from Sporthilfe as long as they live", said Darabos. The Minister also wants to combat doping offences in Austria by introducing severer sanctions. "The new Sporthilfe regulation is an important step but a lot still needs to be done. Doping has developed into a business worth several billion euros worldwide. Therefore we have to look into the mafia structures behind it. The chain between dealers and athletes has to be cut. This is why I want to win a majority in Parliament for an amendment of the existing Antidoping Act. It is certainly necessary to threaten with harsher punishment".

Reception for participants of Special Olympics at Vienna Hofburg

Federal President Heinz Fischer and Minister of Sport Norbert Darabos received the successful participants in the "Special Olympics World Winter Games 2009" in Idaho at Vienna Hofburg on 10 March 2009.

The medal table of the Austrian team is spectacular. The 73 athletes from Austria won a remarkable total of 81 medals (23 x gold, 32 x silver and 26 x bronze) after having celebrated a similar success in Nagano (Japan) four years earlier.

Darabos was highly impressed by achievements: "It is admirable how people whose every-day experiences are definitely not easy find a way through sport to live a successful life. They provide a role model for all of us".

By the way, the 5th National Summer Games of Special Olympics Austria are held in St. Pölten from 17 to 22 June 2010, with athletes from all over the world participating.

Darabos congratulates Ski Jumping World Cup winner Schlierenzauer

Austrian ski jumper Gregor Schlierenzauer concluded the Ski Jumping World Cup season 2008/09 with a historic achievement. Never before did any other ski jumper score more points than the exceptional 19-year-old athlete from

Minister of Sport Norbert Darabos, who watched live how Schlierenzauer earned gold in the team competition and silver in the large hill event at the World Cup in Liberec (former German name: Reichenberg/Czech Republic), congratulated the new winner of the overall World Cup. Schlierenzauer follows in the footsteps of his compatriot Thomas Morgenstern: "Gregor Schlierenzauer has demonstrated unbelievable stamina - and this has made him one of the greatest ski jumpers of all times despite his young age. I wish him and his colleagues the best for the World Cup final in ski flying in Planica. Maybe we will be able to celebrate new records".

Gold at the Junior World Championships: Sabine Schöffmann and Manuel Kramer

Austrian talents won gold at the Alpine Junior World Ski Championships in two completely different winter sports. While the 16-year-old Sabine Schöffmann from Carinthia triumphed in the parallel giant slalom in Nagano, Manuel Kramer from Flachau (Salzburg) decided the men's super-G race for himself at the Alpine Junior Ski World Championships in Garmisch-Partenkirchen (Germany). Darabos was pleased about the strong signal of fledgling Austrian winter sports athletes and congratulated them on their arrival in Austria.

Constantini Didi became new national team coach

53-year-old Tyrolian Didi Constantini was recently appointed new national football team coach, succeeding to the Czech Karel Brückner. He will give his debut in Klagenfurt (Carinthia) on 1 April 2009, when the team will fight for its last theoretical chance to qualify for the World Cup 2010 in South Africa. ■