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■ Regional elections 2009 in Carinthia and Salzburg

On 1 March regional parliamentary, municipal and mayoral elections were held in Carinthia and Salzburg. The surprising result – the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) suffered dramatic losses compared to 2004 in both Länder, the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ) – previously led by Governor Jörg Haider, who died in 2008 – won a sensational victory in Carinthia, while the party did not rally enough support in Salzburg to make it into the Landtag (regional Parliament).

Although the Social Democrats registered a minus of 5.93 percentage points Gabi Burgstaller remains Governor of Salzburg with 39.47% of the votes. The People's Party of Austria (ÖVP) registered an all-time low in votes after suffering minor losses but still came in second. The Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) became third with a significant increase in votes. Support for the Greens remained relatively stable. Voter turnout was 70.6% (272,660 votes cast).

The preliminary result (excl. postal votes) of the regional elections in Salzburg 2009: SPÖ: 39.5% (-5.9% from level of 2004), ÖVP: 36.5% (-1.5%), FPÖ: 13.0% (+4.3%), Greens: 7.3% (-0.7%), BZÖ: 3.7% (+3.7%). Seats: SPÖ 15 (-2), ÖVP 14 (+/-0), FPÖ 5 (+2), Greens 2 (+/-0).

In Carinthia the BZÖ – led by Haider's successor Governor Gerhard Dörfler – managed to strengthen its majority in the regional Parliament (45.5%). The SPÖ recorded an all-time low, support sank to below 30%. The ÖVP was ranked third, the Greens fourth, the FPÖ did not enter the Landtag.

Voter turnout in Carinthia was 77.1% (342,069 of the votes). The preliminary result (excl. postal votes): BZÖ: 45.5% (since 2005, before FPÖ), SPÖ: 28.6% (-9.8%), ÖVP: 16.5% (+4.9%), Greens: 4.99% (-1.7%), FPÖ: 3.8% (2004: 42.4%). Seats in the regional Parliament: BZÖ 18 (+2), SPÖ 11 (-3), ÖVP 7 (+3).

(For detailed election results in Salzburg and Carinthia, incl. municipalities and mayors, see:

<http://www.salzburg.gv.at>, <http://info.ktn.gv.at>) ■

National Council approved extended short-time working arrangements

In view of the economic crisis and increasing unemployment, the federal government, Parliament and the social partners made jobs their number one priority. The National Council adopted new

short-time working arrangements based on an agreement with the social partners on 26 February 2009. Short-time working may be introduced for a period of 18 months (previously six months) or even longer in exceptional cases. Working hours may be reduced by 10 to 90% (previous maximum cut: 80%). In addition, an average number of working hours was laid down; irregular work schedules are an option provided that the total working hours agreed on are reached. Staff retention periods are adjusted to between two and four months, depending on the length of the short-time working arrangement. Net wage losses may not exceed 10%.

All efforts focus on the combat against unemployment, even at the cost of a growing budget deficit, said Social and Labour Minister Hundstorfer. The one-billion-euro labour market budget will partly be invested in further training. A foundation for (5,000) subcontracted temporary employees will be set up within two weeks. 123 million euros – or even more, if necessary – are made available for training about 12,000 young people, Hundstorfer stressed. According to the Public Employment Service, 33,000 persons will be on short-time working in 165 companies up to the end of March. The costs amount to 87 million euros. The Minister expects, however, that 50,000 to 70,000 people will be on short-time working. "I prefer an increase in short-time work to a surge in unemployment", Hundstorfer said. A short-time worker costs one third less than a jobless person. ■

Right of abode reformed

On 24 February 2009 the Council of Ministers adopted a reform of the right of abode for humanitarian reasons. Immigrants living for five or more years in Austria may stay if they meet specific requirements. Clear and transparent rules should become available. Applications for residence can be filed by well-integrated immigrants with homes, jobs and health insurance coverage. Others may apply for residence if a sponsor (private person or charity organisation) takes financial responsibility. Tax money may not be used. Sponsorship is limited to three years and may not be subject to payments or rewards.

The Minister of the Interior decides "old" cases (persons living in Austria since 2004) based on recommendations of the Länder and of an advisory board set up within the Ministry. In more recent cases the humanitarian aspects are taken into account in the standard procedure. ■

Federal Chancellor Faymann at EU special summit in Brussels

Austria was represented by Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann at the EU special summit in Brussels on 1 March 2009. Top items on the agenda of the informal meeting of the 27 heads of state and government were the financial and economic crisis as well as Eastern Europe. The meeting had been convened to prepare the decisions to be taken at the EU's regular summit on 19 and 20 March 2009. Another goal is to forge a joint position for the global financial summit in London (in early April).

There will be no special EU programme for the ailing economies of Eastern Europe but an agreement was reached on cooperating with international financial institutions to support and act in solidarity with the countries of this region. The Central and Eastern European countries were linked by close ties but the situation was different in every country, explained Czech Prime Minister and incumbent EU Council President Mirek Topolánek.

Federal Chancellor Faymann stressed that the exchange of information had been worthwhile. Not "complete packages" had been discussed but existing options of increasing the funds had been explored. Decisions on aid measures would be taken on a case-by-case basis, stated Faymann. The summit participants also shunned protectionism and emphasised the importance of the EU single market. ■

Faymann meets with Sarkozy in Paris

On 3 March 2009 Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann travels to Paris for a two-day official visit. The programme of his visit includes meetings with French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Prime Minister Francois Fillon. Key subjects for debate are the economic crisis and the economic aid package for Eastern Europe proposed by Austria. ■

Federal President Fischer pays official visits to Kuwait and Qatar

Federal President Heinz Fischer paid official visits to the emirates Kuwait and Qatar from 22 to 24 February 2009. He was accompanied by his wife Margit, Minister for Economic Affairs

Reinhold Mitterlehner, Health Minister Alois Stöger as well as a large trade and science delegation. Talks focused on economic issues and the Middle East conflict.

In Kuwait Fischer met inter alia with the Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. In the capital of Qatar Doha he held talks with Emir Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani. With a view to intensifying economic co-operation, bilateral economic forums were held in the two emirates. In addition, closer contacts in science and research are to be established with the Gulf region. In 2007 Austria's exports to Kuwait amounted to 99 million euros. In the same year goods worth 75 million euros were shipped to Qatar. The Austrian foreign trade sector places hopes in the Gulf region registering a strong demand for mechanical engineering, energy and environmental technologies. ■

Foreign Minister Spindelegger at Gaza donor conference

Representatives of more than 70 countries will deliberate on aid for the Gaza Strip at a donor conference in Sharm El-Sheik (Egypt) on 2 March 2009. Donors request, however, that the radical Islamic Hamas will not have access to the money. Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger will also participate in the meeting. Austria had adopted a decision to grant emergency aid of 300,000 euros to the Palestinians in Gaza already in January. ■

Sweden's Prime Minister Reinfeldt stops in Vienna

During his European tour Sweden's Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt stopped in Vienna on 23 February 2009 to discuss the priorities of the forthcoming Swedish EU Presidency (starting in July): the global economic crisis, its effects on Eastern Europe as well as the future of the Lisbon Treaty. In talks with Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann and Minister of Finance Josef Pröll Reinfeldt reaffirmed that he favoured a multi-national approach to aid for Eastern Europe, e.g. via the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Federal Chancellor Faymann underlined that the two countries were "interested in a stable situation in South Eastern and Eastern Europe". Having reaped profits in this region during the economic boom, it was a must to take on responsibility in difficult times. ■

Green light for "eco-premium"

On 24 February 2009 the Council of Ministers decided to introduce a so-called "eco-premium" (scrapping premium) to motivate consumers to get rid of old cars. The total volume of these measures was 45 million euros. The Federal Republic and the economic sector contributed 50% each of the funds, Finance Minister Josef Pröll explained to media representatives. The "eco-premium" was a "strong stimulus to boost sales" and would not fail to show effects on the economy, Pröll stated.

A premium of 1,500 euros is to be paid for cars registered before 1 January 1996 on buying a new car. This subsidy may be claimed between 1 April and 31 December 2009.

Another measure adopted by the federal government as an incentive to invest is accelerated depreciation. In 2009 and 2010 companies will be able to depreciate new movable goods within shorter periods. As a consequence, the tax yield of the Federal Republic, the Länder and municipalities will decrease by about 700 million euros between 2010 and 2012. Accelerated depreciation forms part of the economic stimulus bill, which the Minister of Finance submitted to the Council of Ministers. Both measures were vital to revive the economy, Pröll stated. ■

Austria's leading companies presented financial data for 2008

Recently four leading domestic enterprises presented their financial data for 2008. The rapidly declining oil price in the last quarter of last year pushed the stock listed oil and gas group OMV into the red; the result for the period after minority interests amounted to minus 208 million euros. However, the total annual group sales rose by 27% to 25.5 billion euros. While the profit for the period decreased by 17% to 1.5 billion euros, the operating result increased by 7% to 2.34 billion euros. The dividend will be 1 euro (after 1.25 euros in 2007). For the current year the OMV expects continuing high volatility of all market parameters but in general considers it likely that the crude oil prices will remain stable or increase in the second half of the year. The sound financial structure and conservative fiscal policy of the enterprise would make it possible to "respond adequately to challenges and take advantage of the opportunities arising from a

weak market environment", OMV boss Wolfgang Ruttendorfer explained at the balance sheet presentation conference on 25 February 2009. The group plans to reduce investments to a level considerably below 3 billion euros and to launch an austerity programme worth 300 million euros. Less profitable petrol stations are to be sold. In Italy all 96 petrol stations will be discontinued. Internal production is to be stepped up in 2009.

In 2008 Austria's leading electricity producer Verbund did not only register a sharp increase in profit but also the best result in the company's history. The sales revenue climbed by almost one fourth (23.2%) to more than 3.7 billion euros, the earnings before interest and taxes (EBIT) by a similar percentage to almost 1.14 billion euros. The net result surged by nearly one fifth (18.6%) to about 687 million euros. The dividend is to increase from previously 90 cents to 1.05 euros. In 2008 the Verbund group stepped up electricity production by 1.2% to 28,660 gigawatt-hours, 88% come from domestic hydroelectric plants. According to the new Verbund CEO, Wolfgang Anzengruber, the group plans to continue its investment programme in Austria "without downsizing" (investment volume of 2.8 billion euros). In Italy, France and Turkey investments of about 1 billion euros were envisaged (acquisition of stakes in companies, production).

Telekom Austria (TA) slipped into the red. Although sales increased by 5.1% to 5.17 billion euros, the result for the year 2008 dropped to minus 49 million euros due to high reserves for layoffs in the fixed-line telephone segment. An annual profit of 492.5 million euros had been registered still in 2007. In the mobile telephone business sales went up by 11.7% to about 3.4 billion euros. TA boss Boris Nemsic announced his resignation with effect 31 March 2009. He will be appointed CEO of the Russian Telekom group VimpelCom.

Voestalpine faced the insufficiency of its previous austerity package. The steel group plans to expand short-time working (currently 7,600 employees) and additional personnel cuts. For the financial year 2008/09 ending in March, a decline in the EBIT of 10% to "about one billion euros" is expected, informed Voest CEO Wolfgang Eder. Thanks to a favourable first half year, the nine-month balance sheet still boasts excellent figures. Sales surged by 24.6% to 9.3 billion euros, the EBIT rose by 12.3% to 981.8 million euros. However, the net profit stagnated at 606.1 million euros. ■

Wiener Festwochen 2009

Under the motto “That’s not nearly enough”, Wiener Festwochen (Vienna Festival) led by festival manager Luc Bondy, drama director Stefanie Carp and music director Stéphane Lissner, offer a varied programme from 8 May to 14 June 2009. Among the 40 productions from 28 countries are four premiers and two new productions. The artists and theatre companies come from Belgium, Brazil, Chile, China, Germany, France, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Canada, Kosovo, Lebanon, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Russia, Switzerland, Serbia, Singapore, Spain, South Africa, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, Hungary, Vietnam and the USA.

The International Music Festival jointly organised by Wiener Konzerthausgesellschaft and Wiener Festwochen starts on 9 May and ends on 21 June 2009. This year’s music programme turns the spotlight on Aeneas, who fails to explain Dido why he has to leave and what made him change his mind: “Dido und Aeneas“ by Henry Purcell, produced by Deborah Warner. Other highlights are the Austrian premiere of Philippe Boesmans’ “Yvonne, Princess of Burgundy“ based on the drama by Witold Gombrowicz and Heiner Goebbel’s “I went to the house but did not enter“ delving into texts by T. S. Eliot, Maurice Blanchot, Franz Kafka and Samuel Beckett.

Across all historic periods and stylistic differences, these three works reveal a ritual of indifference, in which violence is connected with a seeming lack of expression and of willpower as well as the tragic impossibility of turning back, of going on, of moving. They are driven by the contradiction between wishing and doing, which leads to standstill, to the inability to move on and, ultimately, to not having any wishes at all.

This esthetical approach of the composers is not the result of deliberate decisions but conforms to an overall concept which also has to do with their attitudes to historical forms and artistic language. Hence, different approaches could be distinguished which can provably be explained by the absence of wishes: the indifference vis-à-vis genres and styles; the effect of the musical interpretations is unsurprisingly cool.

In its fourth edition, the festival programme section “Into the City“ offers four theme weekends addressing urban issues and different communities in a large city like Vienna. In the framework of interdisciplinary events, “Into the City“ presents contemporary Asian music and art,

explores the co-existence of different groups in one of Vienna’s largest social housing complexes, presents the every-day lives of people from Kosovo in Vienna between two countries and puts young women’s culture on stage, namely that of two main ethnic communities living in Vienna – the Serbs and Turks.

The performing arts programme begins and ends with two productions of the Vienna Festival – made, rehearsed and developed in Vienna: Christoph Marthaler will visit the fear-ridden world of post-modern Western Europeans in a village called “Riesenbutzbach“, whose stage model was designed by Anna Viebrock. Peter Sellars transposes Shakespeare’s “Othello“ into a contemporary world of political players. Between these two plays are 25 productions belonging to various genres – from the classic-style drama to video performance, from walk-in installation art to a dramaturgically guided walk through a Viennese neighbourhood. They come from Europe and other continents and serve as seismographs of our awareness.

In a solo-performance, Robert Lepage tells a modern fairytale about the globalised culture industry and what artists lose in it. Drawing on ancient and contemporary plots and texts, Krzysztof Warlikowski reflects on the legitimacy of self-sacrifice and human sacrifice. The group Elevator Repair Service from New York produces breathtakingly good theatre with its interpretation of William Faulkner’s novel “The Sound and the Fury“ about the transformation of a specific society and lifestyle. Latvian director Alvis Hermanis has created a stage adaptation of the short stories of the author Vasily Shukshin – fallen into oblivion for some decades – at a Moscow theatre and with a Moscow cast. These are episodes of simple people not living in Moscow. The play was co-produced by the Vienna Festival. With eight specialists in everyday life, the group Rimini Protokoll gives insights into the first volume of Karl Marx’ “The Capital“, which is nowadays again much admired and widely read.

Jürgen Gosch’s production of Chekhov’s “Uncle Vanya“ and Peter Stein’s version of Kleist’s “Broken Jug“ – starring the brilliant Klaus Maria Brandauer as the village judge Adam – will be highlights of Wiener Festwochen.

The programme line “jugendFREI“ wants to stimulate young people’s (14 years plus) interest in theatre and invites them to participate actively. www.festwochen.at ■

Sensation: doctors from Vienna achieved "Breakthrough of the Year 2008"

A great honour for researchers of the Medical University of Vienna (MUW) at the General Hospital: a study describing the function of the protein "mTOR" was nominated by the US science magazine "Science Signaling" for the "Breakthrough of the Year 2008" in the field of research into signalling pathways in cells. As the MUW informed in a press release, the science journal listed the 40 most important publications in this field in 2008.

Viennese scientists Marcus Säemann and Thomas Weichhart as well as their team of the University Clinics for Internal Medicine II and III and the Department for Medical Genetics published their research in the journal "Immunity" last year. It demonstrates how "mTOR" controls inflammation reactions. "mTOR" is the protein, which is the target of the immune-suppressive agent rapamycin. It senses signals concerning the cellular nutritional and energy status. In this way the protein governs cell growth and cell division. Agents like rapamycin, temsirolimus and everolimus thus also block cell division.

As Weichhart explained to "Wiener Zeitung", the study demonstrates "one possibility why rapamycin is so successful in cancer therapy. The findings of Säemann and me also highlight new possibilities of optimising vaccines with the help of rapamycin".

The sensational work of the medical doctors from Vienna leads to many other possible conclusions. Inflammations are a necessary reaction to different external stimuli such as bacteria and viral infections but also the development of cancer. ■

Vienna: Women's World Awards

The World Awards were founded in 2000 by Peace Nobel Prize winner Mikhail Gorbachev and the Austrian Georg Kindel. The original idea was to create a prize for men committed to peace. Among the prize winners are very different personalities such as Paul McCartney, Simon Wiesenthal or Pope John Paul II.

Since 2004 the Women's World Awards have been presented as a special prize for women, first in Hamburg, then in Leipzig and finally in New York. Among previous prize winners were Ingrid

Betancourt, Benazir Bhutto or Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space.

In 2009 the Women's World Awards are for the first time presented in Austria. The first eight prize winners were announced by the World Awards Organisation in Vienna on 17 February 2009. The prizes are granted in a total of twelve categories.

Here are the nominees so far: Italian actress Monica Bellucci (World Actress Award), British singer Anastacia (World Artist Award), US singer Kelly Clarkson (World Entertainment Award), Italian designer Angela Missoni (World Fashion Award); the 10-year-old girl from Yemen, who was married against her will to a 30-year-old man and went to court, Nojoud Ali (World Hope Award); Peace Nobel Prize laureate Betty Williams (World Achievement Award), entrepreneur and chairwoman of Carlson Group, Marilyn Carlson Nelson (World Business Award) and British singer Marianne Faithful, a great interpreter of Brecht and pop music (Lifetime Achievement Award).

All prize winners will personally attend to accept the awards in Vienna on 5 March 2009.

The Women's World Awards 2009 will for the first time be broadcast on TV in more than 40 countries. The Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF) airs the gala in Austria.

www.womensworldawards.com ■

UNESCO: five endangered languages in Austria

Worldwide about 6,000 languages are known, more than one third are in danger of disappearing. "The death of a language leads to the disappearance of many forms of intangible cultural heritage, especially the invaluable heritage of traditions and oral expressions of the community that spoke it – from poems and legends to proverbs and jokes", UNESCO Director Koichiro Matsuura said recently.

In Austria five languages are endangered. Burgenland-Croatian, Romani and Yiddish are qualified as "definitively endangered" in the Atlas of Languages in Danger presented by the world cultural organisation UNESCO in Paris. But also the Alemannic and Bavarian dialects spoken in Austria are classified as "unsafe".

Burgenland-Croatian is spoken only by about 30,000 people, 19,000 of them live in Burgenland (based on data of the Austrian Statistical Office from the latest census in 2001), the remaining speakers live in Hungary and Slovakia.

Romani, the language of the Roma and Sinti, is still spoken by 3.5 million people living in Austria and various European countries. For Yiddish the Atlas does not state the number of the speakers in Europe. A major part of the Yiddish-speaking people in Eastern and Central Europe had been killed brutally by the Nazis. Today Yiddish is spoken only in a few places in Belarus and Ukraine as well as in various Jewish communities in larger cities.

Approximately 10 million people speak Alemannic dialects – in Switzerland, Liechtenstein, parts of Germany, France and Italy as well as in Austria's westernmost region Vorarlberg. According to the UNESCO Atlas, Bavarian dialects are spoken by 12 million people, not only in Bavaria but all of Austria – except Vorarlberg – and South Tyrol (Italy).

As the editor-in-chief of the UNESCO Atlas, Christopher Moseley, explained the most common reasons for the disappearance of languages were wars and forced displacement. But languages also vanished because immigrants only spoke the language of their new home country with their children to facilitate integration.

www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php ■

Jewish Museum Vienna presents show on composer Eisler

With the exhibition "Hanns Eisler. People and Mass," the Jewish Museum Vienna continues its series "Music in Transition" (up to 12 July 2009). It documents Hanns Eisler's oeuvre against the background of the history of three generations of the Eisler family. Eisler's life and work and his special relationship with Vienna are examined from the perspective of the complexities of European contemporary history. The composer was born as the son of Viennese philosopher Rudolf Eisler in Leipzig in 1898. He lived in Vienna during several different epochs. The last years of the Empire, WWI., the "Red Vienna" of the 1920s, the beginning of Austro-Fascism, his subsequent exile as well as the post-war years – each of these periods marked a new beginning in the life and work of Eisler – Vienna became a key venue in his biography.

He was only 14 years old when he studied Socialist and anarchistic theories. After abandoning his studies at the New Vienna Conservatoire he studied privately with Arnold Schönberg and also Anton Webern – Eisler formed part of the avant-garde of the music scene.

Eisler broke with Schönberg because he wanted art to have practical effects so as to mobilise the mass politically. He shared this view for example with Bertolt Brecht, with whom he started to cooperate closely in the 1930s, later during his exile in the USA and finally in the GDR. He composed more than 80 pieces of music for the cinema and the stage, e.g. for the Brecht plays "The Mother" (1932), "Fear and Misery of the Third Reich" (1945), "Galileo" (1947) or "Schweik in the Second World War" (1957). Up to 1955 Eisler moved frequently between Vienna and East Berlin, where he was appointed professor at the University of Music and was admitted to the Academy of Arts. The composer of the national anthem of East Germany as well as of didactic folk and children's songs was not undisputed in the GDR. Like Brecht he did not give up his Austrian passport and second home. Hanns Eisler, who had written his most fascinating composition for Arnold Schönberg's 70th birthday (1941) – an absolutely undidactic quintet: "Fourteen Ways of Describing the Rain" – died in 1962.

www.jmw.at ■

Austrian book among the "Most Beautiful Books in the World 2008"

At the international bookmaking competition "The Most Beautiful Books in the World" the volume "Marte Marte Architects" published by Springer Verlag in Vienna was awarded the silver medal. An international jury had selected 14 examples of best book design and production from more than 700 entries from 36 countries. The book designed by Reinhard Gassner and Andrea Redolfi had already been ranked among "Austria's Most Beautiful Books 2008" in the category "art and photo books". The award ceremony takes place at the Leipzig Book Fair on 13 March 2009.

www.stiftung-buchkunst.de ■

Crowd-pleasing Accordion Festival

The 10th International Accordion Festival is staged in churches, theatres, clubs and cinemas (ending on 22 March 2009) and presents the world's most renowned accordionists. They all accepted the invitation of the blind Viennese accordion maestro Otto Lechner to play with him in the International Accordion Festival.

www.akkordeonfestival.at ■

Pro football: "6+5 Rule" limiting the number of foreign players in league games is not in conflict with EU law

Since the 1990s and the famous "Bosman judgement", the EU law on the "free movement of workers" has also affected professional football. Rules limiting the number of foreign players in league games have conflicted with the valid principles of European legislation, according to which EU nationals are free to work wherever they want within the EU.

A new proposal for a solution was presented by FIFA last year. The so-called "6+5 Rule" stipulates that the clubs may be required to field at least six players who would be eligible for the national team of the respective country at the start of each match. With this rule, the World Football Federation wants to promote the training of young players, protect national teams as well as ensure the sporting balance and the unpredictability of the results of the matches.

A study recently conducted by five international law experts arrived at the conclusion that the "number of players of a club who are not eligible for the national team of the country of the respective club may be subject to regulations and limited as this was not breaching European law". Thus this rule could soon be put into practice. ■

World Short Track Speed Skating Championships in Vienna

From 6 to 8 March 2009 the World Short Track Speed Skating Championships take place in Vienna. Short Track Speed Skating is not only a type of ice skating but also an Olympic discipline. It is practised on a 111.12m long oval track (usually a hockey rink), in which the skater becomes the winner having knocked out his rivals in several heats. The World Championships are held in the Ferry-Dusika Stadium in Vienna, which has earned itself a reputation as the venue of many mass sports events since its opening in 1977: World Handball Championships, World Cycling Championships, European Volleyball Championships and European Track-and-Field Championships, five Davis Cup competitions. Exciting top-level events have been offered, which thrilled the Austrian audience. But it is a novelty that this stadium serves as a venue for this high-class international ice skating event. The World Championships in Short Track Speed

Skating – a relatively young discipline, which has been admitted to the Olympic Games only in 1992 and has attracted an increasing number of fans since then – will offer spectacular competitions from 6 to 8 March 2009.

"As the Minister of Sports, I wish the organisers a lot of success in preparing the world championships. I also would like to thank the Austrian Speed Skating Association and the City of Vienna in advance for their work", Minister of Sports Norbert Darabos stated.

The Minister keeps his fingers crossed for the Austrian team: "I hope that they will show a similarly good performance as the Styrian Veronika Windisch at the World Championships in Torino last January" ■

Nordic Ski World Championships: magic quartet from Austria

With two gold medals and one silver medal the Austrian ski jumping team excelled at the Nordic Ski World Championships in Liberec (Czech Republic). While Austria's ski jumpers did not win any medals in the individual competition on the large hill on 27 February 2009 due to bad weather and a controversial jury decision, they made up for it in the team competition on 1 March 2009, winning gold before the Norwegians and Japanese.

With six gold medals, first jumper Wolfgang Loitzl became the most successful ski jumper in the history of the world championships after four earlier team titles and his victory at the normal hill. He and his colleagues Martin Koch, Thomas Morgenstern and World Cup leader Gregor Schlierenzauer dominated their rivals during the entire event. Minister of Sport Norbert Darabos was enthusiastic about the clear victory the magic quartet of Austrian jumpers won in his presence.

This outstanding result is also a great success for the Federal Army. Two of the four ski jumping aces – platoon leaders Loitzl and Koch – are army athletes. This is a reason for joy for Minister of Sports and Defence Darabos: "Army athletes can often be found on the top. The Federal Army is one of the main supporters of sports in Austria." Since the foundation of the Army Sports Centre about 4,500 athletes have benefited from the support of the military, including more than 100 women since 1998.

In the Nordic combined and cross-country competitions the Austrians did not do so well, partly failing to realise their potential. ■