

Editorial close: 30 March 2009

No. 07/09

CONTENTS

HOME AFFAIRS ■ EUROPE

Federal government agrees on wage freeze for politicians
Facilitated contract awarding
EU election 09: the top candidates of the parliamentary parties
New passports with fingerprints

EUROPE ■ INTERNATIONAL

Success for Austria: doubling EU aid for Eastern Europe
Minister of Finance Pröll in Germany
Romanian President Basescu pays official visit to Austria
Minister Spindelegger attends EU meeting in the Czech Republic

ECONOMY

Drastic increase in investments in rail and road
Federal Republic supports thermal insulation with 100 million euros
Widening deficit, shrinking GDP
OMV sells stake in MOL

CULTURE ■ MEDIA ■ SCIENCE

The Bregenz Festival 2009
40 years of Carinthian Summer
Vienna Burgtheater: world premiere of Schlingensiefel's "Mea Culpa"
Schauspielhaus Graz: Franzobel's touching "Princess of Eisenerz"
Rauriser Literaturtage 2009: Julia Rabinowich is awarded prize
80th birthday of Ilse Tielsch: tracing the lost motherland
E-government: Austria's export commodity
Vienna Library: "City and Women. A different Topography of Vienna."

SPORTS POLICY

Politics and sports: joining forces for more exercise
Minister of Sport Darabos congratulates snowboarders
Bilateral meeting with Germany: satisfied with cooperation
Great end of season for Austrian biathletes

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Editor: Dr. Franz Putz, tel. ++43/1/53115-2579, fax ++43/1/53115-4274, e-mail: franz.putz@bka.gv.at.
Dispatch: Division VII/2, Ms. Irene Bucher, tel. ++43/1/53115-2958, fax ++43/1/53115-2880, e-mail: irene.bucher@bka.gv.at.
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Federal government agrees on wage freeze for politicians

At the Council of Ministers on 24 March 2009 the federal government agreed on a wage freeze for politicians – besides a number of other specific measures – to give a clear signal that action is taken against the economic crisis. Politicians whose pay is determined in accordance with the Federal Salaries Act will not benefit from a rise in pay. This salary freeze affecting about 900 persons, including members of the National Council, the Federal Council, the regional parliaments, the federal government, the Federal President and the President of the Court of Auditors, results in budget savings of about 3 million euros. Politicians at municipal level are exempted.

Politicians also had to help tackling the severest economic crisis since 1945, Chancellor Werner Faymann told media representatives. Therefore the government had proposed to suspend the 2 to 3% increase in salaries to which politicians would have been entitled under constitutional law in July. The savings potential was 2 to 3 million euros. “It was not enough to balance the budget but this is a necessary contribution politicians wanted to make”, stated Faymann. The President as well as his colleagues in the government had vowed their full support for this project.

Whether this measure is to be adopted as a government bill in the Council of Ministers or to be submitted to Parliament as a legislative initiative is still an open question. Details regarding the amendment of the Constitutional Act must be negotiated in Parliament. A two-thirds majority is required. Faymann expects that the opposition will also give the green light. ■

Facilitated contract awarding

To ensure that the economic stimulus packages will take effect as quickly as possible, the limits for awarding no-bid contracts are raised. According to Chancellor Werner Faymann, the current limit of 40,000 euros for awarding building and infrastructure contracts without undergoing tender procedures is increased to 100,000 euros. Moreover, the threshold for “non-public procurement procedures” is raised from 120,000 to 1 million euros. The coalition parties, business and the municipalities welcomed the new rules and praised particularly the faster investment procedures, which would benefit especially small and medium-sized enterprises. ■

EU election 09: the top candidates of the parliamentary parties

On 25 March 2009, the executive committee of the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) approved the list of candidates for the forthcoming EU election (7 June 2009). Hannes Swoboda, incumbent Vice-President of the SPE in the European Parliament, runs for the third time (after 1996 and 2004) as the SPÖ’s top candidate in the EU election. The Social Democrats want to remain number one. Chancellor and SPÖ leader Werner Faymann stressed that “social concerns in Europe need a strong advocate”. The SPÖ currently has seven MEPs (members of European Parliament).

The front man of the People’s Party (ÖVP) is former Minister of the Interior Ernst Strasser. After his resignation in December 2004 he was active in the private sector and became President of the non-profit organisation “Hilfswerk” based in Lower Austria. He was nominated by the ÖVP’s federal executive committee on 26 March 2009. The ÖVP is represented with six MEPs. The top candidate of the Greens is Ulrike Lunacek, the party’s former spokeswoman for foreign affairs. The Greens currently have two MEPs. The Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) nominated again Andreas Mölzer – as an independent MEP. The favourite of the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ) is National Council member Ewald Stadler, but no final decision has been taken. ■

New passports with fingerprints

According to a press release of Interior Minister Maria Fekter (20 March 2009), new passports with a security chip containing two fingerprints of the owner will be issued in Austria as from 30 March 2009. Thanks to this measure, the forging of passports becomes “factually impossible”. The fingerprints are stored only on the chip containing the personal data of the citizens since 2006. As in the past, new passports are issued by the district authorities, municipal departments and authorised communities. They cost 69.90 euros and are valid for ten years.

Electronic scanners capture digital images of the fingerprints. The Ministry of the Interior and the Government Printers explicitly highlight data protection. The fingerprint files of the authorities would be deleted automatically within two months, said Fekter. The new passports have to be introduced across the EU by 28 June 2009. ■

Success for Austria: doubling EU aid for Eastern Europe

At the EU summit in Brussels on 20/21 March 2009, Austria scored a true success. The 27 EU heads of state and government adopted a decision to double an emergency fund for Central and Eastern European non-euro-zone countries in trouble to 50 billion euros. In addition, EU leaders said they wanted to achieve an increase in the emergency fund of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) from 250 to 500 billion euros at the G20 summit in London on 2 April 2009. The EU Member States are willing to increase their share to 75 billion euros.

Chancellor Faymann explained to reporters that Austria had “made its contribution“, and by achieving a concrete success it had made a vital step towards more stability in Europe and Eastern Europe in particular. Minister of Finance Pröll referred to a “huge political success“, Minister for Foreign Affairs Michael Spindelegger said that the result bore “the hallmark of Austria“.

As far as the banking secrecy was concerned, the all-clear signal was given: Austria and Luxembourg are definitely not put on the “blacklist” of tax havens. Both countries had agreed to accept the OECD standards for transferring bank data. Plans for an automatic exchange of bank account data seem to have been dropped in the long run.

The EU signalled unity in times of crisis also by approving the five-billion-euro recovery plan providing for energy, broadband and rural development investments which had aroused controversy until recently. Austria would benefit also in this area. The EU will earmark 200 million euros for the Nabucco pipeline, which will bypass Russia and deliver natural gas from the Caspian region directly to Europe. The beneficiaries are Austria (OMV), Hungary, Bulgaria, Germany and Romania. Furthermore, a budget of 20 million euros has been projected for a high-voltage current network connecting Vienna and Győr (Hungary). ■

Minister of Finance Pröll in Germany

In cases of tax offences access to information would be facilitated but “automatic data fishing is not possible“, explained Minister of Finance Josef Pröll in Berlin on 25 March 2009, where he held talks with his German counterpart Peer Steinbrück and Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel. Hence, the automatic access to data was no longer a

subject for debate and Austria would continue paying the revenue from withholding tax to Germany, said Pröll. Last year 40 million euros had been transferred to the German tax authorities. ■

Romanian President Basescu pays official visit to Austria

Romanian President Traian Basescu paid his first official visit to Austria on 23 March 2009. Items on the agenda included talks with Federal President Heinz Fischer, Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann and the President of the Economic Chamber Austria (WKÖ), Christoph Leitl. In the presence of Mayor Michael Häupl, Basescu signed the Golden Book of the City of Vienna in the City Hall.

The Romanian President visited Austria in “important, critical times“, stated Fischer. In fact, Romania has been hit severely by the global economic crisis and now claims about 20 billion euros from the IMF and the EU’s net credit line for Eastern European countries. However, Basescu stressed in Vienna that his country was by no means facing a collapse but that the application for credits was only a “preventive measure“. Rating agencies had, however, downgraded Romania. The value of the leu is depreciating, while unemployment is increasing, many credits cannot be repaid. As one of the largest investors in Romania, Austria is also affected by this development and therefore intensifies political efforts. Minister for Foreign Affairs Spindelegger will travel to Romania on 1 April 2009. Romanian Minister for Communication Gabriel Sandu informed himself about Austria’s pioneering e-government system with Secretary of State Josef Ostermayer in Vienna on 26 March 2009 (see Culture/Media). ■

Minister Spindelegger attends EU meeting in the Czech Republic

At the meeting of EU foreign ministers at the Palace of Hluboká nad Vltavou in the Czech Republic on 27 March 2009, Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger stated that the collapse of the government in Prague was not expected to have effects at European level. He hoped that the EU would continue to signal a European perspective to the states of the Western Balkans and that the Lisbon Treaty would be finalised. ■

Drastic increase in investments in rail and road

The federal government drastically increases investments in transport projects as a measure to counter the economic crisis. Minister for Infrastructure Doris Bures presented the respective programmes for expanding the rail network (ÖBB) and high-quality road network (Asfinag) on 25 March 2009. In the period 2009 to 2014 a total of 22.5 billion euros will be made available, 60% for rail projects and 40% for road construction. 360 kilometres of new railway tracks will be laid, including 190 km of rail tunnels (Brenner, Semmering, Wienerwald and Koralm). 320 km of motorways and speedways are in the planning stage, including the Northern Motorway from Vienna to the Czech border. The total budget of 22.5 billion euros includes about 900 million euros for projects contained in the economic stimulus package, which will be realised earlier than planned. The projects are financed by the Austrian Rail Company (ÖBB) and the road management company Asfinag. The average construction investment per year amounts to 3.7 billion euros. This means that the volume of investments in rail and road projects has been “unprecedented in the Second Republic”, stressed Bures. These record amounts were investments in the future, creating value-added for future generations. “We bridge gaps in the road network and raise Austria’s rail network to the level of the 21st century. And what’s more: We create and safeguard jobs for more than 50,000 people“, underlined the Minister. ■

Federal Republic supports thermal insulation with 100 million euros

As from 14 April 2009, private persons and entrepreneurs may apply for subsidies to finance the thermal insulation of buildings erected before 1999. The Federal Republic of Austria allocates 100 million euros. Private persons are refunded up to 5,000 euros, companies receive a maximum of 40% of the expenditure. Private persons insulating walls or replacing old windows may submit applications for subsidies to all bank branches and building societies. The necessary forms will be available as from 14 April 2009. Companies may file applications directly with Kommunalkredit Public Consulting (KPC); the procedure is the same as for subsidies for environment-related

projects. The basis for assessing the eligibility for funding is the “Energy Certificate”, for which subsidies are available from Kommunalkredit as well. The term ends on 31 December 2010.

Private households and companies will receive 50% each of the 100 million euros, which have been earmarked for thermal insulation in the second economic stimulus package. The Ministries of Economy and Environment contribute equal shares. The federal government informed that this measure aims at creating and safeguarding jobs on the one hand; on the other hand, it is an important tool of environmental policy to boost energy efficiency. ■

Widening deficit, shrinking GDP

Minister of Finance Josef Pröll adjusted his deficit target for the year 2009. He does not rule out that the target of minus of 2.5% of the GDP (gross domestic product) will be missed. Therefore Austria’s budget deficit was likely to exceed the EU’s 3% cap in the current year. On 28 March 2009 this was explained by Pröll by worsening economic data. One day earlier, the Economic Research Institute (Wifo) and the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) had forecast that the deficit would in any case exceed the original estimate of 2.5%. According to the economic analysts, the domestic economy will shrink by 2.2% (Wifo) or 2.7% (IHS) in 2009.

Nevertheless, Austria’s economic position was more favourable than that of other EU Member States, stressed the Minister of Finance. It was still important to ease the financial burden on the citizens and to cut expenditure, e.g. of the public administration. He was confident that the economic low “could be overcome energetically” in autumn. Therefore no adjustments of the budget plan for 2010 were envisaged, said Pröll. Minor economic growth was expected for the next year. ■

OMV sells stake in MOL

The OMV sold its 21.2-percent stake in the Hungarian mineral oil group MOL to the Russian energy group Surgutneftegas. According to a press release of the OMV (30 March 2009), the purchase price was 1.4 billion euros.

Due to the requirements of the European Union and the negative attitude of the MOL management to the deal, the OMV dropped its take-over plans in August 2008, informed the company. ■

The Bregenz Festival 2009

Bregenzer Festspiele ("Bregenz Festival") running from 22 July to 23 August 2009 present a new production of Giuseppe Verdi's "Aida" – the unhappy love story between the Ethiopian princess Aida, who had been abducted to the Nile as a slave, and the Egyptian captain of the royal guard Radames. The drama will unfold with passionate duets, choirs and monumental mass scenes on the sumptuous sets of the giant stage on Lake Constance.

The opera "King Roger" by Karol Szymanowski is considered a masterpiece of Polish music. It was performed for the first time in 1926 and is set in Sicily, blending Christian, Arab and ancient elements. The composer combined Byzantine chant, Impressionist musical timbre, Arab-inspired melismatic vocal style, late Romantic pathos and expressive singing. The Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra is conducted by Sir Mark Elder, the production is by David Pountney, the venue is Festpielhaus. The motto of the programme section devoted to operetta is "social satire". At Theater am Kornmarkt three works from different worlds are on show: Dimitri Shostakovich's "Paradise Moscow", George Gershwin's "Of Thee I Sing" and David Sawer's "Skin Deep". This theatre is also the venue of "Lola" – a new production of the Vienna-based Theater an der Josefstadt of Heinrich Mann's novel "Professor Unrat" ("Small Town Tyrant"). Schauspiel Köln offers "Affäre mit Geistern" ("Affair with Ghosts") of Latvian author and director Alvis Hermanis.

Highlights of the orchestral concerts are Szymanowski's highly emotional pieces as well as Richard Wagner's second act of "Tristan and Isolde", Alexander Skriabin's "Poème de l'extase" and Mozart's "Concert for Clarinet".

The programme "Art of Our Times" offers creative domestic and international premiers. For "My Musig" three artists, among them British composer Benedict Mason, were commissioned to explore the sound-world of Vorarlberg. With "Semper Dowland & The Corridor", the music theatre programme includes two new works by Sir Harrison Birtwistle as well as "Anaesthesia", the latest product of the cooperation of Nico and the Navigators with the Franui orchestra.

In the framework of the theatre and performance programme "brut@Bregenz", the Vienna-based theatre company Brut will give its debut on Lake Constance. www.bregenzerfestspiele.com ■

40 years of Carinthian Summer

The Carinthian Summer ("Carinthischer Sommer"), also referred to as the Ossiach-Villach Festival, will celebrate its 40th anniversary with an imaginative programme from 10 July to 28 August 2009. Ossiach has been the centre of church opera for many years. This year "Passion & Resurrection" by British composer Jonathan Harvey will receive its premiere in German language. Reviving medieval church dramas of the Benedictines, he cast the passion of Christ and the resurrection story into the form of a music theatre performance. The audience may participate in the singing of the congregation under the lead of Erwin Ortner, one of the best choirmasters in the world. He is also responsible for the entire production, for which the Arnold Schoenberg Choir and Camerata Salzburg are fundamental. The premiere will take place on 10 July 2009 in the presence of Jonathan Harvey, who spends one week of the year in which he celebrates his 70th birthday in Ossiach as "composer in residence".

The programme includes other first-class events with artists like Rudolf Buchbinder, Oleg Maisenberg, Heinrich Schiff or Robert Holl, presenting a classical Romantic repertoire. In the Haydn Year the "Creation" is featured with a superb cast, including Barbara Bonney. Another revolutionary musician will be commemorated as well, the actual inventor of twelve-tone music, Josef Matthias Hauer, who died 50 years ago and is considered one of the most important composers of the Second Viennese School.

Actors like Anne Bennent, Bruno Ganz and Karl Markovics guarantee memorable nights with an interplay between words and music.

The courtyard of the Abbey of Ossiach will be the venue of serenade concerts. The programme "cs_alternativ" is devoted to progressive pop and world music, e.g. by Soap&Skin and Mnozil Bras. www.carinthischersommer.at ■

Vienna Burgtheater: world premier of Schlingensiefel's "Mea Culpa"

Christoph Schlingensiefel, one of the outstanding (German) directors at Vienna's Burgtheater, has been fighting against his severe cancer for some years. On 20 March 2009 his ready-made opera "Mea Culpa" received its world premiere, deeply moving the audience. The work is part three of a series of performances, in which Schlingensiefel

tries to come to terms with his disease. "Mea Culpa" is never embarrassing, always finds the right balance between utmost privacy and generally valid statements. Apparent borders between the arts are easily overcome, the fantastic world of Christoph Schlingensiefel oscillates between voodoo and video, Wagner and wellness, therapy and theatre, music and myth, art installation and Catholicism. Again and again sumptuously dressed bishops, sassy nurses or swinging dance groups bustle round the stage. The plot gains satirical bite when doctors appear who fail to present devastating diagnoses in a medically correct way and lack human compassion. An old school friend, still in love with Schlingensiefel, waits for him in the other world. And his father says sympathetically: "My poor son". "I am not poor!", the latter exclaims angrily. "I still have a lot to do here! Do you think I want to sit on your cloud?" The remarkable theatre night will be repeated between 26 and 28 June 2009.

www.burgtheater.at ■

Schauspielhaus Graz: Franzobel's touching "Princess of Eisenerz"

The writer Franzobel has been working on a series about Austria in the Second World War for some time. Last year a 88-year-old woman, Milli Deutsch, contacted director Georg Schmedleitner. She then told Franzobel how she was drawn into the resistance fight against the Nazis in Leoben (Styria) in 1944 although she was completely apolitical – "I am as political as a piece of cake". At that time she lived in Eisenerz, became pregnant and hoped that her husband would return in good health from the war. The situation escalated when a friend active in the resistance movement and a former colleague, who was also pregnant and a steadfast adherent of Hitler's ideas, appeared. Milli suddenly had to fight for something that had not concerned her before. But she carried on and, together with the others, managed to survive.

Fear lurks behind Franzobel's vivid language. He has one of the resistance fighters say in the play: "Silence is gold, speech is Dachau". And the ambiguous motto of the petty bourgeois is illustrated in the background of the stage: "Clean hands, clean mouth, clean heart at every moment".

The author and his excellent stage director Schmedleitner succeed in depicting the every-day

life of Eisenerz during the last years of the war. The audience celebrates both of them as well as the brilliant cast: Verena Lercher, Susanne Weber, Gerhard Liebmann, Alexander Rossi, Seraphine Rastl, Sebastian Reiß, Steffi Krautz and Thomas Frank.

For tickets contact 0043/316/8000 or mailto: tickets@theater-graz.com.

Information: www.theater-graz.com ■

Rauriser Literaturtage 2009: Julya Rabinowich is awarded prize

At the "Literature Days of Rauris" ("Rauriser Literaturtage"), Julya Rabinowich received the 2009 Rauris Literature Prize for the Best First Prose Publication in German Language, granted by the regional government of Salzburg, for her novel "Spaltkopf". The prize winner was born in St. Petersburg (then Leningrad, USSR) in 1970 and emigrated with her family to Vienna in 1977. The Literature Days under the motto "Language: Lust. Game. Rage" were opened by Minister of Education Claudia Schmied.

Many personal experiences of Julya Rabinowich can be found in "Spaltkopf" ("Split Head"). The jury gave the following reasons for its decision: "On 180 pages she describes the story of a Russian-Jewish family that emigrated from the USSR to Austria in the late 1970s. The focus is on Mischka, narrating the story in the first person, who is torn between the present in the West and the past in the East. This identity conflict is impressively reflected in the metaphorical title 'Spaltkopf' and the motivic development of the story. Last but not least, the author fascinates with her talent for the grotesque and for tragicomedy. Julya Rabinowich surprises with her daring text, which appeared in an innovative small Vienna-based publishing house specialised in transnational literature (edition exile)."

The author, mother of a 14-year-old daughter, also works as an interpreter in psychotherapies with refugees and studied painting with Christian Ludwig Attersee at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna.

Rabinowich is the author of five dramas, three of which have been performed: "Nach der Grenze" (WUK 2007), "Romeo ± Julia" (Schauspielhaus 2008) and "Orpheus im Nestroyhof" (2008).

www.literaturtage.rauris.net;
www.zentrumexil.at ■

80th birthday of Ilse Tielsch: tracing the lost motherland

One of the most interesting but internationally little known writers celebrated her 80th birthday on 20 March 2009. In 1929 Ilse Tielsch was born in Auspitz/Hustopece (Moravia) as the daughter of the doctor and writer Fritz Felzmann. Aged 16, she fled to Upper Austria in April 1945. In 1946 she moved in with her parents in Vienna who had been displaced from Moravia. After taking her A-level exam she studied journalism and German language and literature at the University of Vienna, graduating with a Ph.D. in 1953. She married in 1950 and became a mother. In 1964 she published her first poetry volume. She was supported by Hans Weigel.

In 1980 one of her masterpieces was published, the novel "Die Ahnenpyramide" ("The Ancestral Pyramid"), a family epic starting in the 16th century and covering four centuries. This book contains subjects Ilse Tielsch was to address also in her later literary oeuvre: the intense past having repercussions in the present, the loss of the (Sudeten German) motherland. The author defines motherland as the place "where you have the right to live, to die, to be buried" or "where we have learned our unique dialect", "where my consciousness was shaped" or "where children can be told: this is your motherland!" But motherland can be explained best through loss, the longing for something that has vanished temporarily or permanently.

With "Heimatsuchen" (1982) and "Die Früchte der Tränen" (1988), Tielsch completed a magnificent trilogy of novels, in which the "diversity and vividness of the history of the Sudeten Germans" (as David Axmann put it) lives on. In 2006 the author published the irritating novel "Das letzte Jahr" in Edition Atelier. In this book she tells the story of the 11-year-old Sudeten-German girl Elfi Zimmermann experiencing the year 1938 in a village in southern Moravia – surprised, confused, frightened. ■

E-government: Austria's export commodity

Austria's electronic administration system becomes an export commodity. After cooperating with countries like Germany, Switzerland, the Czech Republic and Bulgaria, Austria will provide the Romanian government with new

input on e-government. On 26 March 2009, Minister of Communication Gabriel Sandu informed himself about the Electronic File and the Citizen Card in a workshop headed by Secretary of State Josef Ostermayer. The two electronic tools will be further developed by Austria, especially with a view to reducing bureaucracy for young parents and taxpayers in general.

Currently the office of Ostermayer plans a "baby check-in". In the ideal case parents should be able to request practically all necessary documents by contacting the authorities only once: birth certificate, social insurance registration, request for childcare and family allowances as well as registration of residence. The Citizen Card should be used for this purpose. The register of births, marriages and deaths at the place of birth of the baby could accommodate this one-stop solution. The tax reform currently being implemented could also entail a new functionality of the Citizen Card. Ostermayer's staff examines if the individual citizen could check the personal benefits gained from the tax reform by using the Citizen Card.

Furthermore, the Electronic File will cover new administrative areas. The Prison Administration as well as social welfare offices could start working with this tool still in 2009. In 2008 the Office for Tax and Tariff Coordination as well as the Ombudsperson were inter alia integrated into the system. ■

Vienna Library: "City and Women. A Different Topography of Vienna."

Vienna Library in the City Hall presents the exhibition "City and Women. A Different Topography of Vienna" (ending on 26 June 2009). It visualises routes through Vienna, highlights the places of residence and work of historic female personalities and uncovers female urban history. The system of identifying concrete geographical positions highlights the interrelations between places and memory. These routes show where female writers, doctors, architects, actresses, composers, feminists, pedagogues, painters, dancers, musicians, teachers or scholars, activists and politicians lived and worked. The exhibits come from the collections of Vienna Library. Books, brochures, press clippings as well as photos, telegrams, postcards, letters, diaries, work manuscripts, music manuscripts, music prints and billboards are displayed. Free admission: www.wienbibliothek.at ■

Politics and sports: joining forces for more exercise

Together with Minister of Sport Norbert Darabos and the President of the Federal Sports Organisation (BSO), the attending government members Rudolf Hundstorfer, Alois Stöger, Claudia Bandion-Ortner as well as Secretary of State Reinhold Lopatka signed the "Fit for Austria Charter" at this year's Fit for Austria Forum.

The Charter enshrines a basic commitment to the important role of physical exercise and sport for our society.

"I am pleased that other government members also make this clear commitment to the importance of physical exercise and that they are prepared to join forces", stated the Minister of Sport. Encouraged by this positive attitude, Norbert Darabos plans to take further action. A platform for coordinating "sports and exercise for young people" is to be created at government level. ■

Minister of Sport Darabos congratulates snowboarders

Our snowboarders have excelled also this year. Minister of Sport Norbert Darabos was able to congratulate several athletes on their victories in the Overall World Cup: "After winning two silver medals at the Snowboard World Championship in Gangwon, Doris Günther for the first time won the Overall World Cup title."

The men's competitions ended with Austria's triple victory in the overall ranking. Siegfried Grabner was awarded the big crystal globe for the second time (after 2004) in his career of one and a half years, followed by Markus Schairer, the winner of the Snowboard Cross World Cup and world champion Benjamin Karl. Moreover, Stefan Gimpl became the winner of the Snowboard Big Air World Cup. Our biathletes should not be forgotten, winning the Biathlon Relay World Cup for the first time", stated Minister Darabos. ■

Bilateral meeting with Germany: satisfied with cooperation

Following an invitation of the Department for Sport of the Ministry of Sport, a bilateral exchange of information took place between representatives of the Ministry of Sport of the Republic of Austria and the Ministry of the

Interior of the Federal Republic of Germany responsible for EU and international sports affairs in Vienna from 9 to 11 March 2009.

Both sides expressed their satisfaction about the successful development of cooperation in sports policy and vowed to continue and intensify it.

Cooperation will comprise in particular the following areas:

- mutual exchange of information in the area of sports and development policy,
- preparation of environmental concepts for mass sports events,
- dual training system in sports for the disabled,
- bilateral project with young elite athletes in the preliminaries of the Winter Youth Olympic Games in Innsbruck in 2012,
- know-how transfer in the context of Germany's Olympic Training Centres ("Olympiastützpunkte"), and
- mutual support in addressing the topic "sports and economy" at EU level.

The next bilateral exchange of information will take place in Bonn in 2010. ■

Great end of season for Austrian biathletes

Our biathletes celebrated their most successful World Cup season of all times with an outstanding team result in Khanty-Mansiysk (Russia) on Sunday.

In the last men's competition of this long winter, Dominik Landertinger, who had already caused a sensation by earning the world champion title of this discipline in February, became second behind his compatriot Simon Eder, winning the small crystal globe in the mass start.

Minister of Sport Norbert Darabos stated: "This year Austria's biathletes have shown a team unity which can usually be found only in Alpine skiing and ski jumping. Landertinger did not only earn Austria's first crystal globe in the history of biathlon, but we also won the overall ranking of the relay competition. Moreover, we achieved rank two in the standing of nations with three titles in individual competitions and 20 ranks on the pedestal as well as gold and silver medals at the world championships. I congratulate all athletes very warmly and wish them a well-deserved recovery phase." ■