

Editorial close: 25 May 2009

No. 11/09

CONTENTS

HOME AFFAIRS

Austria condemns right-wing radicalism and tirades of hate
Budget Accompanying Acts adopted
Social Democrats win AK elections

EUROPE ■ INTERNATIONAL

Federal President Fischer paid visit to the Czech Republic
Chancellor Faymann meets with EU Commission President Barroso
Brenner Tunnel Memorandum
President of the Republic of Mali visits Austria
Spindelegger: Middle East peace requires a two-state solution
Chinese Parliament chief Wu Bangguo in Austria

ECONOMY

10 billion euros of government credit guarantees for companies
IMF head Strauss-Kahn apologised for miscalculation
OeNB: foreign investments stable despite crisis
Lufthansa acquired 85.1 percent of the AUA shares

CULTURE ■ MEDIA ■ SCIENCE

Cannes Film Festival: Austrian film-makers showered with prizes
Chancellor Faymann: Austria remains a reliable partner of CERN
European Commission awards labels to Austrian universities
Vienna as a fashion hub: 9 festival for fashion & photography
Europe Congress in Vienna. 1989 -2009: Start into a New Europe
Raiding Liszt Festival

SPORTS POLICY

Sports budget reaches all-time high
Minister Darabos won support of “Athletes for Sport“
Vorarlberg’s Association of the Deaf Athletes thanks Minister of Sport

IMPRINT

Owner (publisher) and producer: Federal Chancellery, Federal Press Service. A-1014 Vienna, Ballhausplatz 1.
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.
Website: <http://www.bundeskanzleramt.at>. Excerpts from this text may be reprinted. Published by the Federal Press Service – Vienna.

Austria condemns right-wing radicalism and tirades of hate

The attack of young right-wing extremists on surviving NS victims at a commemorative ceremony in the former concentration camp of Ebensee (Upper Austria) on 9 May 2009 sparked a heated debate on right-wing extremism, anti-Semitism, causes and prevention. Hate slogans on the election posters and the aggressive rhetoric of the Freedom Party (FPÖ) in the preliminaries of the EU elections (7 June 2009) stir up discussion.

Austria's official representatives reacted with unanimous rejection. The heads of state and government, the Churches and religious communities as well as the Social Democrats (SPÖ), the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), the Greens and the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ) sharply condemned the recent anti-Semitic incidents and racist verbal attacks and called for strict distance, mental reorientation, tolerance and intensive educational work. In an interview with the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF) on 19 May 2009, Federal President Heinz Fischer sharply rebuked the authors of the "demagogic" EU campaign slogans of the FPÖ ("The West in Christian hand. Day of retribution", "Appeal against Israel's accession to the EU"): "I think this violates the consensus that we should treat religion and politics with mutual respect but separate them very clearly", stressed Fischer. Chancellor Werner Faymann had harsh words for the FPÖ and its leader Heinz-Christian Strache. Vis-à-vis the media Faymann described Strache as a "hate preacher" trying to win votes with inflammatory speeches. With these election posters, the FPÖ violated religious feelings and tried to stir up antagonism between people. The recent incidents in the former Ebensee concentration camp had shown that massive information was required at schools. Together with Minister of Education Claudia Schmied, an anti-Fascist information campaign promoting mutual respect was prepared, explained Faymann.

The Chancellor reiterated his reproach that the FPÖ provoked anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic resentments also during the budget debate in the National Council on 19 May 2009. In an interview with the magazine *News* (20 May 2009), he stated self-critically that all parties supporting a basic consensus in favour of tolerance and against Anti-Semitism had remained silent for too long: "In this respect we owe something to the people, especially the young generation."

In the plenary session Vice Chancellor and Minister of Finance Josef Pröll reminded of the last major economic crisis before World War II, when emotions were stirred up and the image of the enemy was created artificially. The result was the most bitter period in European history. The ÖVP leader called the electoral advertisement about Israel's alleged EU membership ambitions as "utter nonsense". The Catholic Church also distanced itself clearly. In his Ascension Day sermon (21 May 2009) in Vienna's St. Stephen's Cathedral, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn emphatically stated that the Cross – "a sign of reconciliation and love for enemies" – must not be "misused politically as a fighting symbol against other religions, against other people." Schönborn stressed that the slogan "The West in Christian hand" had to be rejected. This FPÖ election poster was also criticised sharply by the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Austria. It protested "vehemently against any appropriation of the Christian faith on election posters".

Minister of the Interior Maria Fekter apologised officially to the survivors of the Ebensee concentration camp on 21 May 2009. These regrettable incidents were "completely intolerable and had to be condemned harshly", said Fekter. ■

Budget Accompanying Acts adopted

The Budget Accompanying Act for the biennial budget 2009/2010 passed the National Council on 19 May 2009. It relates to 68 individual Acts governing for example the financial consolidation of public insurance institutions, teachers (supplement cuts), improvements for the judicial system (smaller juries of lay judges, higher court fees).

The package for the health insurance institutions provides 184.1 million euros for 2009, including 45 million euros from the federal budget. Cost savings from the reduced VAT rate on medical drugs result in 96.6 million euros. Additional funding will be made available by the Disaster Fund and as from 2010 onwards by a new Structural Fund (100 million euros annually). ■

Social Democrats win AK elections

In the Chamber of Labour (AK) elections ending on 18 May 2009 the Social Democrats (FSG) won 55.9 % (-7.6%) of the votes. Herbert Tumpel remains AK President. The People's Party (ÖAAB) received 25.0% (+1.3%) and the Freedomites (FA) 8.7% (+3.8%). ■

Federal President Fischer paid visit to the Czech Republic

During his state visit to the Czech Republic – currently holding the EU Presidency – on 14/15 May 2009, Federal President Heinz Fischer met with his Czech counterpart Vaclav Klaus and Prime Minister Jan Fischer. He was accompanied by Minister of the Interior Maria Fekter, Minister of Defence Norbert Darabos and President of the Economic Chamber Christoph Leitl. Subjects for debate were the global economic crisis, nuclear energy, EU topics as well as bilateral issues.

The two countries' attitude towards the EU Reform Treaty could be summarised as "We agree to disagree", explained Federal President Fischer after his talks with head of state Klaus. Austria ratified the Treaty of Lisbon in April 2008, while Klaus has not yet signed the ratification approved by the Czech Parliament.

Both sides praised, however, the "very good" bilateral relations, which could still be intensified, e.g. in rail and road transport. Fischer and Klaus opened a joint Economic Forum. The Czech Republic is Austria's fourth-largest trading partner and main export market in Central and Eastern Europe.

The Czech Republic's new independent Prime Minister Jan Fischer assured Austria that the agreement with Austria on the nuclear power plant Temelin in southern Bohemia would be observed "punctiliously". Moreover, Austria's reservations regarding the safety standards and environmental impact assessment were being taken into account, stressed Jan Fischer. ■

Chancellor Faymann meets with EU Commission President Barroso

Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann and Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger will hold talks with European Commission President José Manuel Barroso in Brussels on 27 May 2009. Items on the agenda are the financial transaction tax, social Europe, the climate package as well as transport. Security and the combat against crime are other key concerns of Federal Chancellor Faymann. ■

Brenner Tunnel Memorandum

Austria, Italy and Germany signed a "Memorandum of Understanding on the con-

struction of the Brenner Base Tunnel in Rome on 18 May 2009 under the lead of EU TEN project coordinator Karel Van Miert. This MoU finally gives the go-ahead for realising the transport corridor Berlin-Palermo, which is a core element of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN). Construction work is expected to start in 2013. 2022 is foreseen as the completion date.

According to official estimates, the costs will amount to about 8 billion euros. However, experts think that the expenditure could climb up to 15 billion euros. The MoU defines the transport policy framework for the large-scale project. Common objectives are to expand the feeder lines to the Brenner Base Tunnel and to synchronise the infrastructure and technology measures planned by the countries and operators of the national rail networks. ■

President of the Republic of Mali visits Austria

The President of the Republic of Mali, Amadou Toumani Touré, accompanied by his wife Lobo Traoré, pays a state visit to Austria from 25 to 27 May 2009. His official programme includes meetings with Federal President Heinz Fischer and Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann. Touré played a key role in liberating the Austrian hostages kidnapped in the Sahara in 2008. ■

Spindelegger: Middle East peace requires a two-state solution

On 11 May 2009 the UN Security Council unanimously advocated a two-state solution for the Middle East. Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger, who participated in the ministerial meeting in New York, stated that the appeal of the UN Security Council to Israel to continue the peace talks immediately as an "important signal". Peace in the Middle East could be realised only on the basis of a two-state solution for Israel and the Palestinians. ■

Chinese Parliament chief Wu Bangguo in Austria

During his stay in Austria (15 to 18 May 2009), Chinese National People's Congress leader Wu Bangguo pled for a nuclear-free zone in Eastern Asia and announced the planned cooperation between China and Austria in this area. ■

10 billion euros of government credit guarantees for companies

The Austrian government will lend domestic enterprises a helping hand in procuring liquidity. Government guarantees worth 10 billion euros are made available for credit extension to medium-sized and large enterprises, the maximum limit per company is 300 million euros. This measure mainly aims at overcoming liquidity squeezes and safeguarding jobs. After shortening the review period, the draft Act Strengthening Liquidity of Enterprises (Unternehmensliquiditätsstärkungsgesetz/ULSG) could enter into force still in July, Minister of Finance Josef Pröll, Secretary of State for Finance Andreas Schieder and Minister for Economic Affairs Reinhold Mitterlehner told reporters in Vienna on 13 May 2009.

The federal government would not raise additional funds but restructure the bank rescue package, underlined Pröll. The 75 billion euros earmarked in the package for guarantees and the assumption of liability would be reduced by 10 billion euros. The federal government would guarantee 30, 50 or 70% of the amount of the loan, depending on the credit rating and other criteria to be defined (jobs to be safeguarded, dividend, manager salaries), said the Minister. Oesterreichische Kontrollbank (OeKB) would be in charge of administering the guarantee scheme.

The federal government will provide guarantees for a maximum amount of 300 million euros per enterprise for a term of five years. An adequate fee will be charged for this service. As Pröll informed, the fee will amount to between 50 and 200 basis points, depending on the credit rating of the company. Applications have to be filed by 12 November 2010. The Act will automatically become ineffective at the end of 2010.

Guarantees would be provided only to sound enterprises and to safeguard jobs, emphasised Secretary of State for Finance Schieder. Eligibility criteria are a solid financial basis of the enterprises before 1 July 2008, more than 250 employees and sales of more than 50 million euros. According to Pröll, about 500 companies (250,000 employees) could apply. ■

IMF head Strauss-Kahn apologised for miscalculation

On 15 May 2009 the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Dominique

Strauss-Kahn, apologised to Minister of Finance Josef Pröll for the IMF's miscalculations concerning the risks in Eastern Europe. The "matter was settled", explained Pröll at a joint press conference, in which also OeNB Governor Ewald Nowotny participated. Strauss-Kahn had paid a visit to Vienna to attend the Economics Conference of the Austrian National Bank (OeNB). It had been a "human error", which had not had any effects on the "spread of the securities issued in the Austrian capital market". Nevertheless, this error was "not acceptable", said the IMF head. The global economic analysis was upheld. According to Strauss-Kahn, "the worst" might well be over in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, other problems could crop up. A lot depended on the "rollover" of external financing for the banks in this region. Strauss-Kahn expects a recovery of the global economy in the first half of 2010.

Minister of Finance Pröll stressed that Central and Eastern Europe remained a challenge, the risk was, however, "absolutely manageable". The IMF had demonstrated its ability to act, and therefore continued support would be given to the Monetary Fund, stated Pröll. OeNB chief Nowotny reiterated with regard to the risks Austrian banks faced in Eastern Europe that three quarters of the investment had gone to EU Member States. In addition, a number of safeguards to stabilise this region were in place, including those agreed on with the IMF. ■

OeNB: foreign investments stable despite crisis

In 2008 direct investments from and to Austria have shown a more stable development than expected amidst the economic crisis. Austria's foreign direct investment abroad declined by only 20% to 19.3 billion euros from the level of the record year 2007. In contrast, foreign direct investment in Austria dropped to less than half of the prior-year volume. The amount of 9.3 billion euros was, however, still the second-highest level in history, informed the OeNB. ■

Lufthansa acquired 85.1 percent of the AUA shares

On 12 May 2009, German Lufthansa confirmed that it acquired slightly more than 85% of the AUA shares (4.49 euro per share). The approval of the European Commission is still pending. ■

Cannes Film Festival: Austrian filmmakers showered with prizes

In the past numerous film-directors, actors and actresses from Austria have been highly successful with their work. International critics refer to the “film miracle from Austria”. The miracle continued at the recent 62nd International Film Festival in Cannes (France), one of the most important festivals in the world. Austrian film-director Michael Haneke (born in 1942) won the Palme d’Or (Golden Palm) for his drama “Das weiße Band“ (“The White Ribbon”), shot in black-and-white. The “German children’s story“ – as the subtitle reads – is set in a village in northern Germany before WWI. and illustrates the authoritarian upbringing and violence passed on from generation to generation, paving the way for an even more horrible future. In recent years, Haneke had won the Grand Jury Prize at Cannes for the film adaptation of “The Piano Teacher“ by Nobel Prize laureate in literature Elfriede Jelinek and the Best Director Prize for his thriller “Caché“ (“Hidden”). Isabelle Huppert, incumbent Jury President, and Benoit Magimel had picked up Best Actress/Actor awards in 2001 for the film version of Jelinek’s novel. And it is also an Austrian who has been selected “Best Actor” at Cannes: Christoph Waltz, born in 1956, won the award for his role as an evil SS officer in Quentin Tarantino’s “Inglourious Basterds“. In this film Waltz is the brilliant opponent of Brad Pitt.

Moreover, an Austrian film was granted the Europa Cinema title “Best European Film”: “La Pivellina“ by Tizza Covi and her husband Rainer Frimmel. The film tells the story of a girl, who is abandoned by her mother on a playing ground in Rome and taken on by a circus woman in a trailer park.

Minister of Culture Claudia Schmied congratulated enthusiastically and emphasised that the federal government, the Länder and the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF) would step up film funding. ■

Chancellor Faymann: Austria remains a reliable partner of CERN

More than two weeks ago Minister of Science Johannes Hahn had proposed that Austria should resign its membership in the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN), which the country joined 50 years ago. Hahn wanted to

invest the annual CERN membership fee of 20 million euros into other research projects. This amount corresponds to about 70 percent of the funds earmarked for international memberships in the budget. Currently new institutions for large-scale research based on European cooperation are emerging, e.g. in the field of tissue databases, X-ray lasers and large telescopes. Due to the tight science budget, the necessary funds for participation in these projects are lacking.

After long and careful consideration and holding held in-depth talks with the Minister of Science and Minister of Education Claudia Schmied, Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann decided that Austria should remain a member of the research centre based in Switzerland. Together with Minister Hahn, he informed the press on 18 May 2009: “Austria’s reputation and renown are of superior interest“. The possible dropping of CERN membership was not only criticised by leading researchers but also by Minister of Infrastructure Doris Bures and Governor of Lower Austria Erwin Pröll, who was afraid that the planned cancer research project MedAustron in Wiener Neustadt was at risk, which cooperates with CERN.

Besides, the Federal Chancellor stated that he was not generally opposed to a review of memberships by the competent ministers. Budget items should not be carried forward automatically. As far as CERN was concerned, the membership affected a European research area “demonstrating major success” for several decades.

Even if in public perception the life sciences were increasingly replacing particle physics “as the Queen of Science“, a major part of the current physical research is inseparably linked with quantum physics: from nuclear physics, solid state physics and quantum optics to particle physics. It is a little known fact that the world-wide web was also developed at CERN.

If Austria had left CERN, Austrian particle physicists would have been excluded from research as the high energy level necessary for the experiments can be generated only in large particle accelerators such as the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) of CERN. Austrian companies have been regular suppliers of CERN equipment for many years. The Austrian insurance company Uniqa also holds an exclusive contract of CERN. Chancellor Faymann agreed with Minister Hahn that improvements in the Austrian research landscape should be high on the agenda. Hahn also proposed that within CERN structural

reforms should be contemplated. The cancellation of Austria's CERN membership by the end of 2010 would have saved his Ministry 60 million euros.

But he accepted the government's "consideration of superior interests" and would reorganise the budget of his Ministry as from 2011. In any case the allocation to the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) was not at risk. The Ministry had a budget of 3.5 billion euros. In 2009 300 million and next year 375 million euros would be made available for research. ■

European Commission awards labels to Austrian universities

The European Commission awarded labels to universities from all over Europe, among them two in Austria: the Management Center Innsbruck (MCI) and the University of Applied Sciences of the Vienna Vocational Training Institute (bfi Wien). Minister of Science Johannes Hahn congratulated on the exemplary implementation of the Bologna instruments ECTS and Diploma Supplement: "I am pleased that the Austrian universities are among the model projects of the European Commission and are used as best practice examples across Europe".

The label-holding universities are selected in a two-phase procedure. National experts appraise the applications filed in a first round, then officials of the European Commission examine the applications forwarded to them by the Member States. The key assessment criterion is implementation of the Bologna instruments. The labels awarded remain valid until 2013.

The ECTS – European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System – stands for the unbureaucratic recognition of foreign university credits. Thanks to this credit system, domestic universities can recognise university credits earned at foreign universities in a clear and transparent way. The ECTS system helps ERASMUS students to prepare and organise their university stays abroad.

The Diploma Supplement – forming an integral part of the "Europass" (www.europass.at) – provides a description of the university degree earned. It is issued by the universities together with the university certificate on awarding the degree and offers a clear and internationally comparable report of a person's individual studies.

The implementation of the Bologna process in Austria is monitored and supported by the

Bologna Contact Point of the Federal Ministry of Science and Research, the national Bologna experts, the Bologna Service Unit of OeAD-GmbH and the National Agency for Lifelong Learning.

For more information on the ECTS and the Diploma Supplement Labels see:

www.lebenslanges-lernen.at/Bologna,

www.bologna.at, www.bmwf.gv.at/submenue/euinternationales/bolognaprozess/

The European Commission offers two more opportunities to apply for an ECTS Label and a Diploma Supplement Label until 2013. ■

Vienna as a fashion hub: 9 festival for fashion & photography

From 28 May to 10 June 2009, Vienna will become a fashion hub, showcasing the diversity within the Austrian and international fashion scene in the present day. Fashion shows, presentations of the latest collections, exhibitions on fashion photography but also a symposium exploring fashion and economy will take place at different venues in the city. The programme is rounded off with guided fashion tours through selected fashion shops in Vienna and the traditional Austria Fashion Awards (AFA) ceremony.

In view of economically difficult times and against the background of a young upcoming and internationally acclaimed fashion scene, "Unit f büro für mode" addresses for the first time the new economic challenges to the fashion market and the Internet fashion business in the framework of the "9 festival for fashion & photography". In times of crisis – when traditional practices are questioned and new models are being discussed – it is important to be creative, especially for small companies without a firm foothold in the market. New sales channels and markets beyond the large groups have to be opened up for their products. Together with "go international", an initiative of the Foreign Trade and Investment Organisation (AWO) of the Economic Chamber Austria (WKO) and the Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth, the Vienna-based economic journal "Format" and the leading fashion blogs from Austria SKIR (www.stylishkidsinriot.com) and Stylekingdom (www.stylekingdom.com), "Unit f büro für mode" stages two events – the E-Commerce Day and the Fashion Blogger Day – to explore the role the Internet plays for communication and marketing

in the world of fashion and above all its future potential.

On 5 June 2009 the Fashion 2.0 E-Commerce Day will take place at the Bulgarian Cultural Institute at Wittgenstein House, Parkgasse 18, 1030 Vienna. New sales channels on the Internet and the status quo, the advantages and disadvantages as well as the dos und dont's of the sale of luxury goods via the Internet will be discussed. At present, Internet shops offering luxury and designer goods are flooding the online market. Some international designers even sell their collections through their own websites. Luxury Internet auctions lure customers with luxury goods at bargain prices. The drawback of this trend is that luxury spams with fake luxury goods overwhelm the market, becoming a threat to consumers. This issue will be discussed by Imran Amed (www.businessoffashion.net) with representatives of Internet portals, selling today's fashion on the Internet, e.g. Sarah Curran (www.my-wardrobe.com) and José Neves (www.farfetch.com).

The Bulgarian Cultural Institute at Wittgenstein House will also be the venue of a discussion about fashion bloggers on 6 June 2009. A classy expert team – led by “Welt am Sonntag“ reporter Joachim Bessing – will look into this subject. The debate will focus on online vs. print journalism. Journalistic work is undergoing a radical transformation through the Internet. The symposium will shed light on quality features of fashion blogs compared to the ad-financed print media. The two bloggers Stefan Urschler-stylish-kidsinriot.com and Maria Ratzinger-stylekingdom.com made decisive contributions to developing the programme for the Fashion Blogger Day. The discussion is to highlight the polarity between traditional media and blogs that emerged in the past few years. Bloggers want to be regarded as full members of a new media landscape. During the discussion, a W-LAN hotspot – provided by Freewave.at – will be set up allowing the participants to report about the event live on blogs and portals. The two blogs presented will report about the Fashion Blogger Day and the entire “9 festival” in their blogs and micro-blogs. The “go international” talks will end with the Party “I die. banANNAs – celebrating FASHION 2.0” at Pratersauna.

Among the festival sponsors and partners are the Federal Ministry of Education, Art and Culture, the Vienna Tourist Board (WienTourismus) and

the Vienna Economic Chamber. For more information see: www.9festival.at ■

Europe Congress in Vienna. 1989-2009: Start into a New Europe

Twenty years ago, the people in Central and Eastern Europe succeeded in overcoming the division of their continent. In view of the forthcoming 20th anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain, Austria – together with its Central and Eastern European neighbours – will examine future opportunities and the challenges for the region.

To this end, the Ministry of European and International Affairs organises a two-day international conference at Vienna Hofburg titled “Geteilt/Geeint. 1989-2009: Aufbruch in ein neues Europa” (“Divided/Reunited. 1989-2009: Start into a New Europe“) from 28 to 29 May 2009. Prominent witnesses of the time, high-ranking politicians (Commission President José Manuel Barroso, President Heinz Fischer, Vice Chancellor and Minister of Finance Josef Pröll, Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger, etc.), historians, artists, members of the business community, youth representatives and many others will discuss the importance of the year 1989 for the present and highlight new opportunities for the development of a united Europe. ■

Raiding Liszt Festival

The brothers Eduard and Johannes Kutrowatz will be at the helm of the Liszt Festival in Raiding (Burgenland) as from the beginning of the festival season: “As a composer, cosmopolitan and European, Franz Liszt has been and is a great model for our international activities as artists. We want to try to introduce the audience to his music and his virtuosity at his place of birth Raiding!“ The festival running from 24 to 28 June 2009 has become known as one of the most outstanding festivals for classical music. In the new, purist-beautiful concert hall – adjoining the house where Franz Liszt was born – the festival visitors may benefit from a unique chance to enjoy piano and chamber music, choir and orchestra works as well as jazz concerts with internationally leading artists, such as the piano duo Kutrowatz (24 June) or Elisabeth Leonskaja, who will present Liszt, Chopin, Ravel and Enescu. www.lisztfestival.at ■

Sports budget reaches all-time high

After the official presentation of the amount earmarked for the special federal sports promotion scheme, this year's budget for sport reaches the historic level of about 113 million euros. This is the largest amount ever spent on sport in Austria at federal level, even if the special expenses for the UEFA EURO 2008™ of the last four years are taken into account.

The reason for this highly pleasant budget development in the Ministry of Sport headed by Minister Norbert Darabos is the increasing revenue of the Austrian Lotteries. The budget of the special federal sports promotion scheme has increased from 62 million euros to 71.3 million euros in 2009. This development is remarkable in so far as the funds have more than doubled since 1999, when 31 million euros were allocated to this scheme. Minister Darabos: "The record budget is an opportunity for sport, which, of course, also involves a great responsibility. In cooperation with the sports organisations, we pursue the goal of professionalising high-performance sport, stepping up investments into the young generation and make health and mass sports more popular".

After the responsibilities for sport were transferred from the Federal Chancellery to the Ministry headed by Minister of Defence and Sport Norbert Darabos on 1 February 2009, minor funds for sport are still made available from the budget of the Federal Chancellery, 107.5 million euros from the budget of the Federal Ministry of Defence and Sport. 8 million euros are earmarked for funding under Section 11a of the Federal Sports Promotion Act (Bundes-Sportförderungsgesetz).

For the first time it has become possible to react flexibly to the present needs of sports organisations and to support successful federations, clubs, sports events and athletes based on a targeted approach and by defining priorities. ■

Minister Darabos won support of "Athletes for Sport"

On 11 May 2009, more than 20 Austrian sport stars followed the invitation of Minister of Defence and Sport Norbert Darabos to Gartenhotel Altmannsdorf, where the first meeting of the group "Athletes for Sport" was held.

Among the participants were track-and-field athletes Eva Janko and Andrea Mayr, skiing stars Petra Kronberger and Günther Mader, figure skater Claudia Kristofics-Binder, swimming celebrities Markus Rogan and Vera Lischka, Olympic winner in surfing Christoph Sieber, winner of the Paralympic Games Andrea Scherney, ski jumping legend Hubert Neuper, tennis player Alexander Antonitsch, table tennis world champion Werner Schlager and many others.

"The athletes are right in the centre of sport and have the most direct insights. I think it is important to give them an opportunity to actively co-shape sport and to define pathways for the future development of Austrian sport. I understand this round as a think tank for sport in Austria", said Darabos. He described the athletes as "my absolutely most important group of advisors", stated the Minister.

In the event lasting two hours, the athletes were appointed who will take the lead in tackling the respective theme. Alex Antonitsch will be in charge of "Sport and Youth", Werner Schlager will manage "Sports venues and the training environment", Markus Rogan will be responsible for "Sport and Occupation". The subject "Trainers and coaches" falls within the competence of Gregor Högler, Andrea Mayr will address the topic "For clean sport", while a group headed by Roman Hagara will develop recommendations for improvements concerning "Associations and organisational structures".

Beachvolleyballer Nik Berger has been appointed project manager and will compile ideas and results. The next meeting has been scheduled for early September. ■

Vorarlberg's Association of Deaf Athletes thanks Minister of Sport

In early May, the Sport and Culture Association for Deaf People of Vorarlberg (Vorarlberger Gehörlosen-Sport- und Kulturverein/VGSK) thanked Minister of Defence and Sport Darabos for supporting the sports competitions for deaf people.

The VGSK had invited to the "Games without Borders", the European sports competitions for deaf people, already in 2007.

Association chairman Wolfram Dünser thanked Minister Darabos during his visit to Vorarlberg in early May for the support of the Federal Army in organising the event. ■