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Minister of Finance Pröll presented biennial budget 2009/2010

Minister of Finance Josef Pröll presented his first biennial budget to the National Council on 21 April 2009. The outlook for the budget 2009/2010 is alarming: widening government debts, high deficits for several years as well as increasing expenditure on unemployment benefits and pensions. Describing his two-year budget plan as a “declaration of war against the crisis“, the Minister of Finance explained: “Let’s face it. The next years will be an uphill struggle.“

New borrowings (Maastricht deficit) are expected to amount to 3.5% of the economic performance this year and rise to 4.7% in the period up to 2012 – the third largest deficit since 1976. A slight decline is likely only in 2013. This was due to the “disastrous economic situation“, stated Pröll. The total government debt will climb to 78.5% of the GDP (gross domestic product) or 247.3 billion euros up to 2013. This is mainly a consequence of the several-billion-euro bank rescue package. The amount of 10.3 billion euros allocated to it has a direct impact on the government debt (some loans were already raised last year). This had also effects on the budgets of the individual ministries. Except for the Ministry of the Interior benefiting from a budget increase in 2009 by 1.8 million euros to about 2.3 billion euros, almost all ministries have to face austerity measures. Significantly more money is made available only to the Ministry of Social Affairs. This is mainly due to the rapid growth of un-employment, with costs increasing by 1.1 billion (+23 %) to 5.98 billion euros in 2009. The Federal Republic also has to step up funding for the social insurance system (plus 9.5% to 8.4 billion euros) as income from insurance contributions declines on account of the upsurge in unemployment.

As pension expenditure is increasing and tax receipts are declining (by 3.7 billion euros to 64.8 billion euros in the wake of the tax reform implemented to strengthen purchasing power and consumption), adverse effects on the budget are likely. The total income of the state decreases from 48.2% of the GDP (2008) to 47.5% (2009) and 46.5% (2010), whereas expenditure will increase significantly from 48.6% to 51% (2009) and 51.2% (2010). This results in a minus of 13 billion euros for the next years.

In his budget speech Minister Pröll repeatedly referred to the global economic situation and the difficult economic framework. Therefore the new

biennial budget was characterised by a “spirit of strict austerity“. If he had approved the demands of all ministries, the deficit would have soared to 6.4% of the GDP (with extra costs 18 billion euros), emphasised the Minister of Finance. At the budget debate in the Council of Ministers (1st reading of the budget on 22 April 2009), the Chancellor stated that a “massive joint effort” was necessary and that the combat against the crisis justified the higher deficit. In this situation it was “imperative“ to promote jobs and fight unemployment, said Faymann. A higher deficit was therefore accepted. The economic crisis could be countered and kept as short as possible only by increasing spending. More funds – even though less than in the previous year – are not only granted to the Social Ministry and Ministry of the Interior (plus 5.6% to 7.17 billion euros), but also to the health sector (plus 9.5% to 865 million euros) and the ÖBB (Austrian Rail). The budget of the Ministry of Infrastructure climbs by almost 900 million to 3.1 billion euros by 2013. The annual budget of the Ministry of Economy for economic stimulus measures and economic research is increased by 140 million euros per year from the level of 2008, totalling 575 million euros in 2009. A slightly higher budget of 2.2 billion euros has been allocated to the Ministry of Agriculture in 2009; the funds for environmental issues falling within its purview were increased most significantly, i.e. by 54.7% from the level 2008 to 826 million euros. In 2009 the Ministry of Women’s Affairs for the first time receives more than 10 million euros: plus 14% (1.3 million euros). (For more details on the budgets of the other ministries, the budget speech and the budget 2009/2010, see www.bmf.gv.at).

As personnel expenditure is to be cut, the government plans to replace only every second retiring staff member and to reduce the number of positions by 1,820 up to 2013. Only the Ministry of the Interior will recruit 600 additional police officers by 2013. The Ministry of Defence has to reduce its headcount by 913, the financial and judicial administration by 615 and 170, respectively. A compromise has been reached in the conflict between Minister of Education Claudia Schmied and the teachers’ union shortly before the budget presentation. Measures like the abolishment of pay supplements and a day off per year chosen by the schools, part-time working for older teachers as well as fixed-term contracts for contracted teachers are to result in cost savings of 190 million euros. ■

Syrian President Assad pays visit to Austria

On 27 April 2009 Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, accompanied by his wife Asmaa, arrived in Vienna for a two-day official visit to Austria. In Vienna he held talks with Federal President Heinz Fischer, Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann, Minister of Finance Josef Pröll, Speaker of Parliament Barbara Prammer and Vienna's Mayor Michael Häupl. Besides bilateral economic and cultural issues, the political challenges in the Middle East and Syria's important role in this context, were high on the agenda.

As the President's Office informed, other subjects for debate are Syria's approximation to the European Union and its entering into the planned association agreement, which will provide a basis for intensifying economic cooperation. Together with President of the Austrian Economic Chamber (WKÖ) Christoph Leitl, Fischer and Assad inaugurated an Austro-Syrian economic forum. The Federal President had been received as a guest in Damascus in December 2007.

The sightseeing programme includes Vienna's Treasury (Schatzkammer) and Schönbrunn Palace. The presidents' wives Asmaa al-Assad and Margit Fischer visit St. Anna Children's Hospital and the SOS Children's Village in Hinterbrühl. ■

Luxembourg's Prime Minister Juncker pays visit to Vienna

Luxembourgian Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker, who is also incumbent Minister of Finance of his country and presides the EU's Eurogroup, met with Federal President Heinz Fischer, Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann and Minister of Finance Josef Pröll in Vienna on 17 April 2009.

The talks with Federal Chancellor Faymann focused on economic and social policy issues. Both countries were concerned about the labour market situation, explained Faymann. Nevertheless, the starting position was good compared to other EU Member States.

Juncker agreed with Faymann that social issues were not addressed adequately at European level and that dismantling the social system could not be the "clumsy response to the crisis". Social security should be a priority as people should not have to suffer even more under the impact of the

economic slump, said Juncker. The economic stimulus packages of the EU Member States were expected to show first effects in 2010. The crisis had to be countered actively by strengthening purchasing power, for example by granting social benefits.

With regard to the "grey list" of OECD, on which the two countries had been placed in the context of the banking secrecy, Faymann highlighted the common approach of Austria and Luxembourg. The purpose of the banking secrecy was not to cover fraud and crime but to safeguard the interests of the citizens. However, tax evaders should not be protected. The Austrian Parliament would soon vote on a respective bill.

In Vienna Juncker vehemently rejected the statements of US Nobel Prize laureate in economics Paul Krugman that Austria was facing national bankruptcy due to its heavy investments in Eastern Europe. In the light of evidence to the contrary, these speculations were by no means justified, stated Juncker. ■

Federal Chancellor Faymann visits Slovakia

Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann paid a visit to Bratislava on 30 April 2009. The programme includes talks with his Slovak counterpart Robert Fico. Among the topics to be discussed are energy issues and economic cooperation. The safety of the nuclear power plants Jaslovské Bohunice and Mochovce is likely to be up for debate as well. ■

Foreign Minister Spindelegger in Bosnia and Herzegovina

During his visit to Sarajevo on 24 April 2009, Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger explained that replacing the office of the "High Representative" of the international community by an EU Special Representative, as planned by the EU, is to encourage Bosnia and Herzegovina to continue implementing necessary reforms. After a meeting with Foreign Minister Sven Alkalaj, Spindelegger reaffirmed Austria's support for Bosnia and Herzegovina "on its way to Europe" and for its application for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Furthermore, Spindelegger presented the Austrian "Danube Region Strategy" in Sarajevo. The goal was to strengthen the commitment of the Danube countries and to intensify networking. ■

Minister of Finance Pröll at IMF meeting in Washington

Minister of Finance Josef Pröll expressed his commitment to the decisions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as well as the IMF reform with faster quota increases (determining voting rights) to the emerging countries. He made this statement in a telephone interview with the Austrian Press Agency (APA) on 26 April 2009 from Washington, where he participated in the spring meeting of the IMF and the World Bank. More demands were made on the IMF: "I support what the IMF needs. This is absolutely the right development", stated the Minister of Finance. Pröll described the fact that the IMF planned to triple its available lending resources to 750 billion US dollars (567 billion euros) in the medium term as "absolutely positive".

The increase in the IMF funds hardly put a strain on the budgets of the donor countries as the money came from the currency reserves of the central banks. The European contribution of 105 billion dollars will be distributed based on the previous IMF quotas. The EU has a 31.5% stake in the voting powers of the IMF.

According to Pröll, the IMF followed an "ambitious" approach towards stabilising Central and Eastern Europe. The situation in the region was a top item on the agenda of the spring meeting. Vienna's initiative to support Eastern Europe was "welcome by everyone", as many bilateral talks had shown, stressed Pröll. In March the European Council of the 27 heads of state and government had agreed on doubling emergency credit aid for the non-euro countries in Central and Eastern Europe to 50 billion euros as demanded by Austria.

According to the Minister of Finance, the Austrian bank aid package could be extended to mid 2010. This had been proposed by RZB (Raiffeisen Zentralbank) boss Walter Rothensteiner. Before approving a possible extension beyond the year 2009, it was indispensable to evaluate the current bank aid package. ■

Mail Market Bill under review – more postal outlets

On 20 April 2009 Minister of Infrastructure Doris Bures submitted the Mail Market Bill ensuring the countrywide supply with mail services. The most important details are: the number of postal outlets

(post offices or partner outlets) will be defined for the first time and is to be increased from currently 1,500 to 1,650. Österreichische Post AG remains responsible for the countrywide supply with mail services even after the full market opening in early 2011. The population was "guaranteed the supply with postal services. And for Post AG and the private suppliers a clear and fair framework is established", underlined Bures in an interview with APA (Austrian Press Agency). She hoped that the bill would be passed by summer.

The next postal outlet must be within a maximum of ten kilometres. In communities with more than 10,000 inhabitants and in all district capitals for 90% of the population the distance to the nearest post office must not exceed two kilometres. Not all outlets have to be open during five days a week. Outlets not owned by Post AG (post partners) with less than 20 weekly opening hours or five working days on the entry into force of the new law will also qualify as postal outlets.

In June Post AG and the German provider Hermes will start cooperation. The latter withdraws from parcel delivery services in Austria. Parcels of business clients – above all the large mail order companies Otto/Universal and Quelle/Neckermann, will be transported by Austrian Mail to the consumers. The considerably smaller volume of parcels of private customers of Hermes will be handled by the logistics company DPD. ■

Austria is refunded 40 million euros from the EU budget

Austria is refunded 40.3 million euros from surpluses of the EU budget 2008. As the European Commission informed in Brussels on 15 April 2009, the surplus of the 115.8-billion-euro EU budget of the previous year totalled about 1.8 billion euros. This amount is credited to the account of the EU Member States for the next budget year. ■

Inflation dropped significantly in March

According to the Austrian Statistical Office (Statistik Austria), inflation dropped significantly in Austria. In March the inflation rate was down to 0.8% year-on-year, after 1.3% in February. The downward trend is due to lower fuel and heating oil prices. ■

Architect of the New Europe: a fundamental book about Alois Mock

Alois Mock, who celebrates his 75th birthday on 10 June 2009, is one of the pioneering politicians of the Second Republic. Thanks to his long-standing and firm commitment to Austria's accession to the EU as a foreign minister, he will go down in history. After the successful conclusion of Austria's membership talks with Brussels in 1994, he became known as "Mister Europe".

Alois Mock started his long political career in the 1960s as Secretary and Chief of Cabinet of Chancellor Josef Klaus. Later he became Minister of Education, Vice Chancellor and – as mentioned before – one of Austria's most farsighted foreign ministers. This became manifest during the crisis in Yugoslavia, when Mock drew faster and clearer conclusions than many of his counterparts in other countries. He advocated the EU's Eastern and South-Eastern European enlargement at a very early stage. This fact was praised by former Federal Chancellor Franz Vranitzky, who stated at Alois Mock's 60th birthday celebrations: "You, dear Mr. Minister, are among those realising very early that faith in the future of our Republic and in joint work should lead us where geography and history have always placed us – to the centre of Europe".

Chairing the EDU for almost 20 years and the IDU for four years, it was, by the way, Mock, who helped to add a European dimension to the conservative party platforms. He won international renown for his commitment to democracy and human rights. The key to all his activities was undoubtedly his Christian outlook. The politician was born into a middle-class family in Euratsfeld (Mostviertel/ Lower Austria) in 1934. He passed his A-level exam in 1952 at the grammar school of the Seitenstetten Abbey (Human-istisches Stiftsgymnasium Seitenstetten) – an excellent school attended also by legendary former Chancellor Julius Raab under whom the State Treaty had been signed. Mock's action was based on the concept of Catholic Social Teaching. He advocated "eco-social market economy" – a term coined by his party friend Josef Riegler. Mock also wanted to make environmental protection part of the programme of the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP). This and many more interesting facts are documented in the first comprehensive biography of Alois Mock. The well-written books supported by documentary evidence is based on numerous talks with

witnesses of the time, companions and soul mates – including, of course, Mock's wife Edith – as well as previously unpublished material from archives about domestic and international politics between the 1970s and the 1990s.

The text certainly also owes its quality to the wealth of experience of the two authors: Martin Eichtinger, incumbent Austrian ambassador to Romania and Moldova, has not only held numerous high political offices but was also the personal secretary of the foreign minister from 1988 to 1992.

Helmut Wohnout served as a secretary of the ÖVP's parliamentary club and headed the Office of the Second President of the National Council, Heinrich Neisser, from 1992 to 2000. He occupied leading positions in the Federal Chancellery, e.g. Chief of Cabinet of Secretary of State for Art and Media Franz Morak and manages the Karl-von-Vogelsang Institute devoted to research on the history of Christian democracy in Austria. Besides, Wohnout authored a profound article on the little known history of the Austrian Hospice in the historic city centre of Jerusalem in the 20th century – which today is "a meeting place of different cultures with the flair of Austrian tradition and culture", as the author put it – for the standard work edited by Stefan Karner and Lorenz Mikoletzky "Österreich. 90 Jahre Republik. Beitragsband zur Ausstellung im Parlament" ("Austria. 90 Years of Republic. Volume of Contributions Accompanying the Exhibition in Parliament"), Innsbruck 2008.

The authors approach "Alois Mock" from different perspectives – Eichtinger as a diplomat, Wohnout as a contemporary historian. The first part of the book exploring Mock's background and domestic career was written by Helmut Wohnout, the second part treating highlights of his foreign affairs career is by Martin Eichtinger. The last chapter "Die Zeit der Ernte" ("Harvest Time") is based on the ideas and observations of the two authors, explaining their method as follows: "We admit that we are generally very close to Alois Mock, whose political activities (...) we were able to witness firsthand for several years. Nevertheless, we tried to base our book on a strictly objective and academic approach (...)". A book with many rare photos.

Martin Eichtinger/Helmut Wohnout: Alois Mock. Ein Politiker schreibt Geschichte. (Alois Mock. A Politician Making History.) Styria. Vienna-Graz-Klagenfurt 2008.

ISBN 978-3-222-13234-6 ■

Wien Museum: a publisher offering sensations from Old Vienna

Wien Museum Karlsplatz was opened in April 1959 – precisely 50 years ago – with an exhibition about an artist, publisher, button and fan manufacturer as well as reporter for the yellow press named Hieronymus Löschenkohl (1753-1807). This was his real name although it sounds as if had been invented by Viennese playwright Johann Nestroy (1801-1862).

To celebrate the anniversary of the museum, a show was staged which turns the spotlight once more on Löschenkohl, a fascinating media personality in Vienna in the age of Enlightenment. Crucial parts of the exhibition of 1959 were reconstructed.

Hieronymus Löschenkohl was a busy producer of pictures, who disseminated the breaking news of his time. He had excellent contacts with the imperial court. Skilfully and with unerring business sense, he took advantage of the relative press freedom under Emperor Joseph II. He sold silhouette portraits and copper engravings for up to 7000 times. His silhouette portraits of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Joseph Haydn are famous even today. Löschenkohl used to turn up everywhere – even at the court – and to document the events on the spot: victims of accidents, war atrocities or balloon trips, with the style varying from descriptive to dramatic. He opened up new businesses at breathtaking speed, outshining his competitors. He produced calendars, introduced the congratulatory card in Vienna, sold printed wallpaper, buttons and fans, published party games and made sure that his “inventions” became the talk of the town. He placed written advertisements in “Wiener Zeitung“, which then like all the other dailies was published without pictures. People used to queue up in front of his shop in Vienna (Kohlmarkt), which had become a trading place for copper engravings and printed music known all over Europe.

The highly interesting exhibition, which also presents portraits of the main collectors of about 800 objects – August Heymann and Max von Portheim – can be visited up to 16 August 2009. www.wienmuseum.at ■

Vienna ImPulsTanz 2009

Vienna’s international dance festival ImPulsTanz 2009 will be opened with a live performance of

the company of tap dancer Savion Glover from New York in the courtyard of Vienna’s MuseumsQuartier (MQ) on 16 July 2009 (free admission).

Up to 16 August 2009 the world stars of contemporary dance will gather once more in Vienna – from Wim Vandekeybus’ Compagnie Ultima Vez and the Belgian cult band DEUS led by rock star Mauro Pawlowski to the French choreographic icon Maguy Marin.

Austrian choreographer Philipp Gehmacher will play a key role in this year’s festival. Besides acting as a mentor of the scholarship programme danceWEB (inviting again more than 60 young dancers from 40 different countries to Vienna in summer), he will be responsible for several performances, e.g. together with Milli Bitterli.

The effects of capitalist excesses are reflected also in the ImPulsTanz performance programme – but the confrontation takes place at the level of dance. In his piece “Orgy of Tolerance“, Jan Fabre and his Compagnie Troubleyn present human nature – based on a free interpretation of Herbert Marcuse – as a “buying animal”. As its survival instincts are dominated by the shopping behaviour, it falls into a bottomless hole. The festival also presents Antony Rizzi, star dancer of Ballett Frankfurt. In Peter Jasko’s piece elements of Slovak folk dance clash with release technique; Nina Kripa, who performed at this year’s Oscar award ceremony, gives an introduction to the art of HipHop, Terence Lewis will again teach Bollywood dance. This is only a small selection of the outstanding programme. The manifold ImPulsTanz workshop programme offers entertaining as well exceptional training opportunities for dance lovers from 4 to 94 years also this year. www.ImPulsTanz.com ■

“Last Heroes“ at the Innsbruck Festival of Early Music

The motto of the Innsbruck Festival of Early Music under the artistic management of René Jacobs is “Last Heroes“. It alludes to the fact that 200 years ago the Tyrolians fought against the Napoleonic troops composed by French, Saxonian and Bavarian soldiers at Bergisel and that Tyrol will focus on its “freedom hero” Andreas Hofer.

However, heroes who have always dominated myths and adventure sagas are usually just normal people, who are often not without blemish. It is only a symbolic, victorious fight, e.g. against dragons, giants and other monsters, that turns

them into role models who are monumental, terrible and wonderful at the same time. The Greek called them Perseus, Achilles or Heracles, in Northern Europe there is King Artus, Siegfried or Beowulf, as freedom fighters they are called Arminius, El Cid, Robin Hood or Wilhelm Tell, in more recent times “Superman” or “Spiderman”. The festival programme features numerous heroes and wannabe heroes. Tyrol is represented with music by the Hapsburg Chamber Band of Emperor Maximilian and his successors. In the anniversary year the programme includes two operas by Joseph Haydn. While the women in “L’isola disabitata” deal with very confuse male images and profoundly irritate their well-meaning rescuers, in “Orlando Paladino” a lively crowd of terribly love-sick knights, fearful princes and brainless war heroes gathers, that has been inspired by Ludovico Ariosto’s magnificent novel “Orlando furioso” (1516).

Immerse yourself in an epoch when men pretended to be men even though they sang soprano – like the venerated castrates – and when love was the only heroic deed of which one had to be afraid and which was worth dying.

www.altemusik.at ■

Elfriede Jelinek’s “The Contracts of the Businessman” cheered in Cologne

On 16 March 2009 Elfriede Jelinek’s latest play “Die Kontrakte des Kaufmanns” (“The Contracts of the Businessman”) was presented in a dramatic reading at Vienna’s Akademietheater. The Nobel Prize laureate prohibited the performance of the piece in Austria but fulfilled the wish of director Nicolaus Stemann – whom the author holds in high esteem – to present this “business comedy” in a one-time dramatic reading in Vienna. As Jelinek said, there were countless crimes in “economic history” which – from a retrospective perspective – had partly been planned in a surprisingly primitive way. In these scandals greed, meanness and all those things that had made capitalism so popular came together, and finally led to its triumph“. Both the audience and critics had acclaimed the meandering text recited in more than four hours without intermission. Actors like Barbara Petritsch and Rudolf Melichar impressed in the role of an old couple and tattered angels of justice. Two recent financial scandals in Austria provided Jelinek with most of the material

for the play – the fiasco of the BAWAG Bank owned by the Federation of Trade Unions (ÖGB) caused by wild hedge fund speculation and the collapse of the real estate fund Meinl European Land.

The audience applauded the play enthusiastically also in Cologne, where it was premiered as a co-production of Thalia Theater Hamburg and Schauspiel Köln on 16 April 2009. The director was once more Nicolaus Stemann, who introduced the performance by stating that it was “not a production in the usual way” but an installation of a “text implementation machinery”. In a three-and-a-half hour performance without intermission – in which the audience could leave their seat and get for example something to drink – the economic and financial flows, the machinations of some managers and the greed of small investors come under attack. ■

Minister Claudia Schmied: every year more money for art and culture

“We are pleased to have achieved a budget increase of 33 million euros for art and culture in 2009 in our negotiations“, stated Minister of Culture Claudia Schmied in the National Council on 21 April 2009.

According to the Ministry of Education, Art and Culture, the federal government budget for art and culture is raised by 32.7 million euros from the prior-year level to 447.1 million euros in 2009, in 2010 it will amount to 431 million euros.

The increase for 2009 includes one-time effects of 7.5 million euros for the European Capital of Culture Linz09 and the pertinent projects as well as the Haydn Year. Furthermore, Schmied reiterated that domestic filmmaking and the Austrian film industry were high on her agenda. Austrian film-directors have been highly successful for many years, the international audience even refers to an “Austrian film miracle”. Nevertheless, government funding is comparatively modest. This year the Austrian Film Institute (ÖFI) has a budget of 15.57 million euros, the same amount that had been made available in 2008. Now 3 million euros, which the ÖFI had received in 2008 in addition to its 12.6-million-euro budget from the Ministry of Finance and reserves of the Ministry of Culture, are transferred to the regular budget. Hence, the ÖFI will benefit from additional funds only in 2010, an increase by 1 million euros to 16.57 million euros has been approved. ■

From distributing subsidies to modern sports funding

Only two months after taking office, Minister of Sport Norbert Darabos has already implemented parts of the government agreement on "SPORT". Together with the National Council, he made a vital step towards a comprehensive reform of the federal sports promotion scheme by adopting transitory legislation, i.e. Section 11a of the Federal Sports Promotion Act. For the first time it has become possible to react flexibly to the needs of organised sport and to promote successful associations, clubs, sports events and athletes in a more targeted way. "The aim is to support those stakeholders in sport suddenly losing sponsors and funds due to the economic crisis. And another goal is to provide well-aimed support for high-performance sport to ensure, for example, that successful sports associations for individual disciplines are able to send athletes to international large-scale sports events. For instance, the Austrian Swimming Association has achieved that about 20 athletes qualify for the world championships in Rome in July, but this will entail significant travel expenses", stated Darabos.

Based on the existing distribution key, the Swimming Association receives 59,000 euros less than in 2008. Budget cuts will affect also other successful associations, e.g. the Judo Association, the Sailing Association, the Canoe Association or the Table Tennis Association.

The centrepiece of the guidelines regarding Section 11a of the aforementioned Act, which will be issued by the Minister of Sport in the next days, are the so-called "talks on evaluation and prospects". Together with the Federal Sports Organisation (BSO), the Ministry of Sport will hold individual talks with all umbrella organisations, the associations of the various sports disciplines and the associations for disabled sports. Moreover, additional funds are to be made available to NADA for anti-doping measures.

The newly created transitory provision is a first step towards the large-scale reform of the federal sports promotion scheme, which has been laid down in the government programme. Darabos: "I will prepare this reform jointly with all players in sport, who will be put on an equal footing, to ensure that we will succeed in providing sport with a new, state-of-the-art Federal Sports Promotion Act as a professional basis for work as from 1 January 2011." ■

Darabos congratulated Andrea Mayr on marathon victory in record time

Minister of Sport Norbert Darabos was very pleased about the highly successful conclusion of the 26th Vienna City Marathon, where the Austrian participants made an impressive performance in beautiful spring weather: "I congratulate first and foremost marathon winner Andrea Mayr on her huge success. She did not only set a new national record for the women's race in 2:30:43 thanks to the great last kilometre but also became the second domestic women runner in 22 years to win this competition of a longstanding tradition. Hundreds of thousands of marathon fans along the course were very enthusiastic, and many of them have certainly been motivated to participate actively next time. As Federal Minister of Defence and Sport, I am very pleased about the fact that army athlete Andrea Mayr also supported the Austrian Federal Army in winning increasing renown for promoting competitive sport". ■

Austrian billiard ladies successful at European Championships

With three European champion titles, Austria's women billiard players did not only win all gold medals at the Pool Billiard European Championships in St. Johann/Pongau (Salzburg) but also received great acclaim from the audience. Minister of Sport Norbert Darabos was also impressed and congratulated local hero Jasmin Ouschan (winner of the 8-ball and 9-ball competitions) and Gerda Hofstätter (new European champion in Straight Pool): "Our billiard ladies fully met the high expectations for the European Championships held in Austria and won what could be won. The Pool Billiard European Championships were a huge success, not least because of that."

Austria's most successful judoka Ludwig Paischer could also rejoice over a medal. At the Judo European Championships in Tbilisi (Georgia), Paischer – who had ranked second in the Olympic Games in Athens – won bronze. Minister of Sport Darabos offered his congratulations also to him. ■