

Editorial close: 21 September 2009

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CONTENTS

HOME AFFAIRS ■ EUROPE

Government agrees on childcare, social insurance and asylum issues
Vorarlberg: regional elections 2009

EUROPE ■ INTERNATIONAL

Chancellor Faymann in Brussels
Federal President Fischer pays official visit to Poland
Fischer and Spindelegger at UN General Assembly in New York
Ferrero-Waldner withdraws UNESCO candidacy
Andreas Hofer Parade in Innsbruck

ECONOMY

Economic development: experts see early signs of recovery
Car sales increased
FlyNiki: more passengers, more sales and more airplanes
Capital increase of OMV

CULTURE ■ MEDIA ■ SCIENCE

Linz09: Bruckner Festival opened with critical speech by Menasse
Vienna: Bruno Kreisky Prize 2008 to Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt
Venice Film Festival: Hausner's "Lourdes" showered with prizes
Linz09 Capital of Culture: "Kepler" by Philip Glass at Landestheater
Vienna Art Week 2009

SPORTS POLICY

Minister of Sport Darabos secures future of the Klagenfurt Stadium
"Day of Sport 2009": Austria's sports elite comes together
Never-ending series of medals for Austrian athletes

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Government agrees on childcare, social insurance and asylum issues

After the two-day government meeting behind closed doors in Salzburg (14/15 September 2009), Chancellor Faymann and Minister of Finance Pröll praised the “constructive cooperation“ of all participants: “The government has demonstrated its capability of finding a good solution after intensive talks“, said Faymann. The coalition partners – the Social Democrats and the People’s Party – had reached an agreement on the financing of the health insurance institutions, the asylum law amendment, the means-tested childcare allowance and the initial steps of the administrative reform. Their decisions were approved by the Council of Ministers, which met also in Salzburg. Minister for Women’s Affairs Gabriele Heinisch-Hosek and Secretary of State Christine Marek presented the “new childcare allowance scheme“, which will enter into force on 1 January 2010. A new option with a 12-month entitlement (plus 2 months for the other parent) is added to the existing three models (30+6 months, 20+4, 15+3). Moreover, a means-tested child-care allowance of 80% of the last net income – but at least 1,000 and a maximum of 2,000 euro – will be introduced.

The discretionary earnings cap of 16,200 euro per year remains unchanged. The subsidy rules were amended. 180 euro per month are granted to persons with a personal monthly income of a maximum of 357,74 euro; the partner may not earn more than 16,200 euro annually. The subsidy does not have to be repaid but will be limited to one year. The means-tested model does not provide for subsidies. Based on a new rule, lone parents will be entitled to an additional two months of childcare allowance if their partner died, serves a prison sentence, is severely ill or earns less than 1,200 euro and if child maintenance proceedings were initiated.

The main aim of the means-tested childcare allowance is to encourage fathers to take parental leave. The Minister for Women’s Affairs expects the number of fathers on parental leave to climb to 20% (previously between 4 and 10%).

600 million euro have been allocated to the set of measures for restructuring the health insurance system presented by the Chancellor and the Vice-Chancellor. 100 million euro will be granted only after the institutions achieved major cost-savings. Based on the catalogue of measures prepared by the Federation of Social Insurance Institutions and the Medical Chamber, the social insurance insti-

tutions are to cut costs by 1.725 billion euro by 2013. Apart from the quick financial aid of 50 million euro already granted, the promised amount of 600 million euro will be distributed as follows: 450 million euro will be transferred in three instalments of 150 million for debt settlement, 100 million euro were earmarked for the Structural Fund but will be paid only after internal cost cuts (e.g. due to revised fee schedule for medical professionals and smaller packages of medication). The Chancellor explicitly ruled out that higher fees or taxes would be used to cover the costs of the social insurance institutions.

Minister of the Interior Fekter and Minister of Defence Darabos presented the agreement on tightening the law applying to aliens. The “centre-piece“ of the proposal is that repeat asylum applications filed after a negative decision will no longer prevent removal from Austria. The new rules are said to comply with human rights standards. It will become possible to deport asylum seekers if the Court of Asylum does not revoke the Federal Asylum Office’s decision within one day. Asylum seekers will no longer be protected against removal if a repeat application is filed within 10 days before the planned removal. Removal may be prevented through a repeat application only if a war breaks out in the country of origin. So-called Dublin cases, for which another EU Member State is competent, will generally be taken into detention pending expulsion. Other than in the past, expulsion proceedings are opened if asylum seekers commit criminal offences. Final judgments with prison sentences of more than one year may lead to removal if there are no more reasons for asylum. X-ray exams to determine the age of asylum seekers will be permitted.

As far as the administrative reform is concerned, the realisation of 32 projects entailing cost-savings of about 100 million euro annually has been adopted at federal level. ■

Vorarlberg: regional elections 2009

At the regional parliamentary elections of Vorarlberg on 20 September 2009, the People’s Party (ÖVP) led by Governor Herbert Sausgruber won again an absolute majority. 261,132 persons were eligible to vote, voter turnout was about 67.41%. The preliminary result (without postal ballots): ÖVP 50.82% (-4.10%), Freedom Party (FPÖ) 25.25% (+12.31%), the Greens 10.37% (+0.20%), SPÖ 10.06% (-6.81%). Seats: ÖVP: 20 (-1), FPÖ: 9 (+4), Greens: 4 (+/-0), SPÖ: 3 (-3). ■

Chancellor Faymann in Brussels

The EU heads of state and government agreed on a joint negotiating stance for the forthcoming global finance summit (G-20) in Pittsburgh at an extraordinary meeting in Brussels on 17 September 2009. One of their priorities are stricter rules governing the pay of bank managers. Bonus payouts are to be made only if the banks realise profits over a longer period and are to be discontinued if performance is bad. Moreover, a proposal is to be examined whether bonuses should be pegged to the total pay budget for managers or to the profits of the banks.

The EU will not propose a global tax on financial market transactions ("transaction tax") at the G-20 summit as the Member States hold different views on this issue. Chancellor Werner Faymann and his German counterpart Angela Merkel had put forward a plea in favour of the transaction tax.

Federal Chancellor Faymann also met with EU Commission President José Manuel Barroso for confidential talks in Brussels. One of the subjects for discussion was the appointment of European Commissioners to the new EU Commission. Faymann gave Barroso a list with nominees for Austria's next EU Commissioner. Their names will be presented in November. ■

Federal President Fischer pays official visit to Poland

President Heinz Fischer met with Polish President Lech Kaczynski in Warsaw on 15 September 2009. Items on the agenda included the EU Reform Treaty of Lisbon, the intensification of bilateral relations, economic cooperation, climate protection projects as well as the celebrations to commemorate the outbreak of WWII. Fischer was accompanied by his wife Margit as well as a trade and science delegation.

After the meeting with Fischer, Kaczynski stated that he would sign the Lisbon Treaty if the result of the Irish referendum in October was positive. Fischer said the chances were "good" that the EU Treaty would enter into force. It would make the EU "more flexible in some respects" and strengthen the European Parliament. Fischer praised Poland's commitment to the EU's Eastern Partnership. He opened an Austrian-Polish economic forum together with Prime Minister Donald Tusk. Both sides emphasised that the bilateral relations were "very good" but could still be intensified. ■

Fischer and Spindelegger at UN General Assembly in New York

Austria is represented by Federal President Heinz Fischer and Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger at this week's UN General Assembly. The highlight is the special session of the UN Security Council on nuclear disarmament on 24 September 2009 chaired by US President Barack Obama. Austria became a non-permanent member of the highest UN body for two years in January. Austria will take the chair in November, focusing on the better protection of civilians in armed conflicts.

The UN General Assembly will be opened on 23 September 2009. One day earlier the heads of state and government attend a summit on environmental issues and climate change.

In parallel, Fischer and Spindelegger participate in a number of bilateral meetings. Fischer holds for example talks with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. ■

Ferrero-Waldner withdraws UNESCO candidacy

European Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner pulled out of the race for the position of UNESCO Director General. As the Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed on 20 September 2009, Ferrero-Waldner decided "to withdraw in the superior interest of the organisation and European unity". There was no longer a basis for upholding her candidacy. Ferrero-Waldner had been ranked third in the (third) vote of the Executive Council on 19 September 2009. ■

Andreas Hofer Parade in Innsbruck

The highlight of the Tyrolean Andreas Hofer celebrations (in commemoration of the anniversary of the Tyrolean Struggle for Freedom against the Bavarians and the French in 1809) was the Provincial Parade in Innsbruck on 20 September 2009. About 70,000 spectators watched the parade of about 30,000 members of traditional costume societies and associations of "Schützen" (Tyrolean riflemen) from the "European region" Tyrol, South Tyrol, Trentino. Federal President Heinz Fischer underlined the European character of the event. ■

Economic development: experts see early signs of recovery

The Institute of Advanced Studies (IHS) will make an upward revision of its economic forecasts for 2009 and 2010. But also the Economic Research Institute (Wifo) sees early signs of a recovery of the Austrian economy. After the IHS projected a decline of the gross domestic product (GDP) by 4.3% still in June, IHS head Bernhard Felderer's latest estimate is more optimistic. According to Felderer, a slight upward revision of the forecast has become necessary, and with a growth rate of more than half a percent, there was more room for manoeuvre in 2010. Recent data from the USA and Europe would in any case indicate the end of the recession. But it would still take "two or three years" to overcome the consequences of the financial and economic crisis. Felderer expects the level of 2008 to be reached only in 2012. Last year, the Austrian economy grew by 1.8% in real terms.

In late June Wifo assumed a GDP decline by 3.4% for 2009 and predicted a GDP growth of 0.5% for 2010, while the Institute of Advanced Studies considered a plus of 0.3% likely. The two institutes will present their next forecasts on 25 September 2009.

Many signs indicate that the economy starts to recover, stated the experts. Although the domestic economy shrank by 0.5% instead of 0.4% in the second quarter of this year from the level of the previous quarter, the tax reform and the premium for scrapping old cars had triggered an increase in private consumption expenditure. A plus of 0.4% from the first quarter was recorded, when private expenditure growth was only 0.1%.

Austria's exports dropped by more than 2.3% in the second quarter, but this was significantly less than in the first quarter (minus 7.4%).

The European Central Bank (ECB) sees signs that the economic downturn is easing but calls on the countries to cut their expenditure as soon as possible. As from 2011 onwards, cost-savings resulting from structural measures should amount to at least 1% of the GDP. ■

Car sales increased

The Austrians bought considerably more cars in August, even after the scrapping premium has been phased out. According to the latest surveys of the Austrian Statistical Office (Statistik

Austria), the number of new cars licensed based on final data rose by 22.6% to 22,423. However, a low level of car sales had been recorded before this sales boom. In August of last year, the number of cars licensed dropped by 14.3% after the tax on new cars based on petrol consumption was changed.

The government's so-called "eco-premium" (a premium for scrapping old cars) for stimulating the car market was phased out in July 2009. The market for commercial vehicles and two-wheeled vehicles shows a downward trend. ■

FlyNiki: more passengers, more sales and more airplanes

With his "low-cost quality airline", Niki Lauda considers himself the winner of the bankruptcy of competitor SkyEurope and of conditions imposed by the EU for approving the Lufthansa-AUA deal. Despite the economic crisis, the number of passengers transported by his company rose by one quarter, turnover went up by 20% and the result for the first six months of 2009 grew by 30%, explained Lauda in Vienna on 14 September 2009. His estimates for the second half of 2009 were "rather cautious" as the income per passenger had started to decline and the new strategy of Lufthansa/AUA could not be anticipated. But he expected that last year's record result of 7.1 million euro (after taxes) would still be exceeded.

In 2012 FlyNiki will expand its fleet from 12 airplanes to 16; two new planes will be leased from Lauda's partner Air Berlin (approx. 24%). The airline will fly three times a day from Vienna to Frankfurt as from November 2009 after the European Commission forced Lufthansa and AUA to renounce slots on this route. In February 2010 FlyNiki will start to offer daily flights to Sofia, Bucharest and Belgrade, these destinations were "long-term growth markets" and important for Vienna's role as a hub, stressed Lauda. ■

Capital increase of OMV

The Austrian mineral oil group OMV won the banks JPMorgan Chase & Co, Barclays Bank and UniCredit SpA as partners for its capital increase informed the news agency Bloomberg. According to informed sources, the capital increase will raise as much as 800 million euro and it will be realised still in 2009. The financial resources will be used for financing a take-over of up to 54% of the Turkish petrol station operator Petrol Ofisi. ■

Linz09: Bruckner Festival opened with critical speech by Menasse

The Bruckner Festival (“Brucknerfest”) Linz 2009 was ceremoniously opened on 13 September 2009. The programme included a spectacular speech by writer Robert Menasse, in which he attacked above all the Third President of the National Council, Martin Graf (Austrian Freedom Party). It was a scandal that the Republic of Austria had a parliamentary speaker sympathising openly with the NS ideology. Graf had been elected by representatives of the political parties constituting the basis of the Austrian state. They failed to grasp the damage they had caused to the country and did not have to face any consequences. Menasse also criticised the democratic deficits in the EU and the fact that those were talking about wealth who dismantled the welfare state and that those were talking about security who did not understand the idea of subsistence security but believed literally “dead seriously” that “security” depended on how efficiently refugees were driven into death.

These are only some of the issues addressed in Menasse’s speech, with which the opening was concluded and which was applauded by the audience. The politicians could not react to it as they had made their statements before. President Fischer had advocated a “House of History”. He considered this project vital, especially in view of the current 70th anniversary of the outbreak of WWII. and because before that the 20th anniversary of the political turnaround in Eastern Europe had been high on the contemporary history agenda. This showed the important functions such a centre could fulfil for awareness building, for young people and academic research – besides many other tasks. Fischer also praised the numerous events and cultural buildings realised in the framework of “Linz European Capital of Culture 2009”. Similar points were stressed by EU Commissioner for Culture Jan Figel, Governor Josef Pühringer and the Mayor of Linz Franz Dobusch. Minister of Culture Claudia Schmied emphasised that the Bruckner Festival was true to its motto “Traditionally Different“, upholding the valuable and developing the new.

“InnenDonner“ – a work by Klaus Pruenster commissioned for the opening – was given its world premiere by the composer, Bruckner Orchester Linz and the Ad Libitum Choir conducted by Dennis Russel Davies. Running until 5 October 2009, the Bruckner Festival presents a

varied programme going far beyond the scope of classical music programmes. Name-giving Anton Bruckner moves into the background this year, making room for “celebrity of the year” Joseph Haydn and new programmes oriented towards jazz, performance art and visualisation, e.g. the project “Eye Music“. Haydn’s oratory “The Creation“ – performed by Bruckner Orchester Linz under Davies at Brucknerhaus – was transmitted live as a “classical sound cloud” to the Danube Park by the Upper Austrian branch of the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF). Thousands of people attended the fascinating show. www.brucknerhaus.at; www.klangwolke.at ■

Vienna: Bruno Kreisky Prize 2008 to Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt

The educational organisation of the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) and the Dr. Karl Renner Institute have granted the Prize for the Political Book in commemoration of Bruno Kreisky (1911-1990) since 1993. Its aim is to promote political writing that reflects the values and objectives of the legendary Social Democratic chancellor and party leader and that has been influenced by key aspects of his political work. Besides the basic values of equality, social justice and solidarity, notions like tolerance, international cooperation as well as the combat against authoritarian and right-wing tendencies as well as freedom of the arts are upheld. Apart from the main prize, special prizes and prizes in acknowledgement of merits were awarded.

Former prize winners include Erika Weinzierl, Eric Hobsbawn, Marie Jahoda, Thomas Rothschild, Marion Countess Dönhoff, Ian Kershaw, Amartya Sen, Joseph Stiglitz, the Commission of Historians of the Republic of Austria, Amos Oz, Jorge Semprún, Oliver Rathkolb, Jürgen Habermas, Tony Judt and Alaa al-Aswani. On 18 September 2009 Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt were awarded the Bruno Kreisky Prize for the Political Book 2008 “for their complete journalistic oeuvre“ – at the Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue in Armbrustergasse, the former block of flats where Kreisky used to live. The welcome and presentation speech was given with insider expertise by former Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer, the President of the Renner Institute. Other speakers included Chancellor Werner Faymann and Hannes Swoboda, MEP and chairman of the jury. Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt are among the

most important German intellectuals of the past decades. Kluge was born in Halberstadt in 1932. As the director of films like “Abschied von gestern“ (1966), he became an important representative of the New German Film and the genre “film d’auteur”. In 1963 he started to teach at the University of Design of Ulm, where he headed – together with Edgar Reitz – the department of filmmaking.

In cooperation with Oskar Negt, who was born near Königsberg in 1934 and was professor of sociology at the University of Hannover from 1970 until his retirement in 2002, Kluge authored several publications and books such as “Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung“ (1972), “Geschichte und Eigensinn“ (1981) and “Maßverhältnisse des Politischen“ (1992). In 2001 these books were republished by the two authors under the title “Der unterschätzte Mensch“ (“The Undervalued Human Being”).

Oskar Negt has had close ties with the trade unions since the 1960s. As a student, he was Deputy Head of a federal school of the Federation of German Trade Unions. One of his most influential publications was authored specifically for the educational work of this school: “Soziologische Phantasie und exemplarisches Lernen. Zur Theorie der Arbeiterbildung“ (“Sociological Fantasy And Exemplary Learning. On the Theory of Workers’ Education”) (1964). He explores the new challenges facing the unions in the age of globalisation in his book “Wozu noch Gewerkschaften? Eine Streitschrift“ (“Do We Still Need Unions? A Pamphlet”) (2004). Political engagement is no longer based on traditional organised models and the time when “prospects for the future and progress” were the prerogative of the unions are long gone“. The unions should not only represent an “a struggle of interests in economically tight times” but also offer a wider range of programmes outside companies, shifting the focus on leisure and cultural programmes. By limiting themselves to their traditional role, the unions were bound to fail. In today’s world, capital was not prepared to struggle with organisations as it was flexible and flowing rapidly thanks to technology. Capital avoided confrontation by moving. Even if the unions had lost more and more of its competence the fact had to be highlighted that in the past they had forced powerful industrialists to make concessions: “For the welfare state and democracy form an inseparable unit. Those damaging the core of the welfare state, lay the axe to the root of democ-

ocracy”. In his important book Oskar Negt focuses on the human being as a whole. He does not limit himself to the internal problems of companies but also addresses concerns outside the workplace.

Oskar Negt published one of his most fundamental and controversial works in 2001: “Arbeit und menschliche Würde“ (“Work and Human Dignity”). In this book he describes unemployment as a violent act, depriving millions of people of the right to live in dignity – currently there are about 21 million jobless persons in Europe – although the industrialised countries are richer than ever. Drawing on the European history of ideas, he diverts attention away from the pure market logic of capitalism and sparks off a debate on the connection between work and culture, the importance of the just distribution of work for a functioning democracy. The book presents the first and most comprehensive analysis of all social and cultural aspects of the phenomena work and unemployment. The author argues that only a politically responsible economy could overcome the social divide and guarantee a world order ready for peace.

Besides the main prize for Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, other prizes were awarded in recognition of special achievements, i.e. to grammar school teacher Bernhard Kusche, cultural manager and journalist Evelyn Steinhilber as well as the political scientists of the University of Innsbruck, Erika Thurner and Alexandra Weiss.

With the story about the life of Erna and Walter Wodak – between displacement, exile and returning – in “Die Wodaks“, Kusche succeeded in making an in-depth and precisely nuanced analysis of key themes of the 20th century. After the seizure of power by the National Socialists in 1938, Austria disappeared from the international community of states. Questions concerning perpetration and the status of female victims have not yet been answered adequately. Jewish and Romani women, women as resisters, displaced forced labourers but also followers of the Nazis are in the spotlight of Steinhilber’s prize-winning work “Frauen 1938“ (“Women 1938”), which has been conceived as an open and heterogeneous compendium on this important subject.

Under the title “Johanna Dohnal – Innenansichten österreichischer Frauenpolitiken“ (“Insights into Austrian Women Policies”), Thurner and Weiss published a series of lectures held by the former Minister and pioneer in Austrian women’s politics, Johanna Dohnal, at the Innsbruck Faculty of Political Science and Sociology. Dohnal gives

an overview of women's policy in Austria: from the first reforms relevant to women's policy in the 1970s and the "institutionalisation" of women's policy as an independent policy to cooperation with the Autonomous Women's Movement and debates within the Social Democratic Party of Austria. Johanna Dohnal's review clearly shows what could be achieved but also how defence mechanisms against women became more subtle. It is more difficult to argue against the neoliberal statement that perfect equality has been achieved than against outright sexism. The lectures by Dohnal also demonstrate that a policy promoting gender democracy has never been simple but that it is indispensable for humanising society.

www.kreisky.org/kreiskyforum/ ■

Venice Film Festival: Hausner's "Lourdes" showered with prizes

At the 66th International Film Festival in Venice "Lourdes", a feature film of the Austrian director Jessica Hausner, won no less than four prizes, i.e. the Fipresci Prize of the International Film Critics, the Signis Prize of the Ecumenical Jury, the "La Navicella" and the "Brian" Prizes. Hausner's drama is about a wheelchair-bound woman who can miraculously walk again, at least temporarily. The superb performance of the French actress playing the lead, Sylvie Testud, was applauded by the press and audience.

Jessica Hausner was born in 1972 as the daughter of the Viennese painter Rudolf Hausner. She studied at Vienna Film Academy and caused a stir in 2000 with "Lovely Rita", the portrait of a young girl feeling constrained by her family. In 2004 she shot the film "Hotel". Together with Barbara Albert, Antonin Svoboda and Martin Gschlacht she founded the Vienna-based film production company coop99 in 2004. ■

Linz09 Capital of Culture: "Kepler" by Philip Glass at Landestheater

The fruitful cooperation between the (current) head of the Linz opera house Dennis Russell Davies and US composer Philip Glass has been lasting for many years, leading to several sensational performances in the recent past, e.g. the opera "Orphee" based on the script for Jean Cocteau film's with the same name (1949). Glass composed the opera "Kepler" expressly for Landestheater and Linz 09. It received its

sensational world premiere on 20 September 2009. The libretto – partly in German and partly in Latin – is by Martina Winkel and includes texts by Kepler, from the Bible and poems by Andreas Gryphius.

The work traces the intellectual cosmos, rather than the biography of the great astronomer and mathematician Johannes Kepler, who lived and researched in Linz from 1612 to 1627 and whose credo was: "Without genuine knowledge life is dead". In the midst of the atrocities of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), Kepler – who was born near Stuttgart in 1571 – tried to decipher the divine plan "in the book of nature", searched for the mathematically accurate solution for the order of the universe. "God created everything from numbers".

The stage cosmos for "Kepler" was designed in the proper style by director and video artist Peter Missotten. The Bruckner Orchester Linz led by Dennis Russell Davies plays the Glass score masterfully. In fact, it is one of the world's best orchestras in interpreting the works by Glass whose minimalistic music often exhibits rock-like pulsation. As in previous Glass performances, the Landestheater Linz Choir led by Georg Leopold, composed of singers from different nations, was just phenomenal.

Tenor Martin Achrainger singing the title role drew thunderous applause, not only because he managed to make every word understandable but also because of his qualities as an actor, making the scholar's persistent search for meaning and his insatiable hunger for the truth a thrilling experience for the audience. When Dennis Russell Davies emerged from the orchestra pit and the crew responsible for the production as well as Philip Glass himself appeared on stage, the enthusiasm of the audience was boundless.

www.landestheater-linz.at ■

Vienna Art Week 2009

With about 60 events, Vienna Art Week – from 16 to 22 November 2009 – is the biggest annual showcase for arts – from baroque to contemporary trends. For five years it has brought together international museum directors, curators, collectors, critics as well as personalities of Vienna's art community. Vienna Art Week illustrates the great diversity of the art scene.

www.viennaartweek.at ■

Minister of Sport Darabos secures future of the Klagenfurt Stadium

The outcome of the large-scale meeting on the “Klagenfurt Stadium” convened by Minister of Sport Norbert Darabos in early September was a clear commitment to preserving the stadium with a capacity for 30,000 spectators.

“As Minister of Sport, I am against the destruction of infrastructure. I have made this clear to all those involved. Subject to the approval of the Ministry of Finance, the stadium will be preserved in its entirety and will be used as the second largest venue for national matches of the Austrian Football Federation (ÖFB) in Austria“, said Minister of Sport Norbert Darabos after the “stadium summit”, in which representatives of the City of Klagenfurt, the regional government of Carinthia, the ÖFB and the Ministry of Sport participated.

A round of experts is to determine the concrete financial needs for completing the stadium quickly. The costs are to be covered from the budget the Ministry of Sport made available for the EURO stadiums. This was accepted by all the parties involved. ■

“Day of Sport 2009“: Austria’s sports elite comes together

On 26 September 2009 Vienna’s entire Heldenplatz is turned for the ninth time into Austria’s largest open-air sports arena. More than 300,000 visitors are again expected to attend the gathering of Austria’s sports elite. The list of the sports stars awaited seems much like a “Who’s Who” of Austrian sports champions. Successful winter sports athletes such as Gregor Schlierenzauer, Thomas Morgenstern, Wolfgang Loitzl, Benjamin Raich and Kathrin Zettel, but also the beach volleyball celebrities Steffi and Doris Schwaiger will join the sports party and give autographs.

One of the numerous highlights is the traditional award ceremony for the most successful athletes on the main stage. Minister of Sport Norbert Darabos will confer awards on the Austrian world and European champions of last year as well as the successful participants in the Olympic Games of Beijing, above all Mirna Jukic, Ludwig Paischer and Violetta Oblinger-Peters. Darabos: “In the past few months a number of regrettable incidents has caused tremendous damage to high performance sport. The traditional Day of Sport

allows us to re-focus attention on our successful athletes. For top athletes are the most important role models in sport. Their achievements motivate hundreds of thousands of people to follow their example and encourage children and young people to engage in sport and to do physical exercise.“

The varied programme does not only present sport stars but also provides a platform for Austrian sport with more than 120 stalls. The visitors are invited to participate in the numerous activities. Talking of “participation”, “Join in!” is also this year’s cheer of encouragement for the visitors of the Day of Sport. In a “join-in competition” the citizens may not only try new sports in 120 “join-in facilities” but also win a car. ■

Never-ending series of medals for Austrian athletes

In the recent past our athletes have been highly successful in various international high-class sports events.

At the European Table Tennis Championships in Stuttgart Austrian table tennis ace Werner Schlager earned a silver medal in the men’s singles final – the 18th medal in his long career. Before he had won bronze together with his colleagues Gardos and Chen in the team competition.

The beach volleyball duo Florian Gosch/Alexander Horst clutched a silver medal at the European Beach Volleyball Championships in Sochi. They were only defeated by Dutch title holders Reinder Nummerdor/Richard Schuil. The silver medal is the greatest success of the duo and is the third piece of precious metal for Austria after the titles earned by Nik Berger/Clemens Doppler in 2003 and Doppler/Peter Gartmayer in 2007.

A major success of Austrian athletes was reported also in water sports. Stefanie Borzacchini and Michaela Taupe-Traer won a bronze medal in the lightweight women’s double sculls at the European Rowing Championships in Brest.

Last but not least, mountain biker Elisabeth Osl became the first Austrian to win the overall title in the final race of the Schladming Word Cup.

Minister of Sport Norbert Darabos was highly impressed by these outstanding achievements: “Austrian athletes have once again demonstrated that that we are a sports nation and achieve world-class levels in many sports. I congratulate all successful athletes very cordially!“ ■