

NEWS FROM AUSTRIA

Editorial close: 15 November 2010

No. 22/10

HOME AFFAIRS

Red-green coalition in Vienna
Minister of Health Stöger advocates countrywide hospital reform
Special police unit for eastern Austria achieved decrease in crime

EUROPE INTERNATIONAL

Federal President Fischer pays visit to South East Asia
Ukrainian Prime Minister Azarov meets with Federal Chancellor Faymann
Austria extends participation of the Federal Army in UN missions
Foreign Minister Spindelegger at Danube Summit in Bucharest

ECONOMY

Chancellor Faymann: austerity programmes should not jeopardise growth
Austria grows more strongly than Germany and the EU
Metalworkers: real wages increase by 2.3 percent
SMEs are the strong backbone of the economy

CULTURE MEDIA SCIENCE

Brecht on Vienna's theatre stages: author declared dead is remarkably lively
SEZUAN.GUT.MENSCH: brilliant Brechtian play by bernhard ensemble
Charity party: 25 years of Society for Threatened Peoples – Austria
Kammeroper: Joseph Haydn's masterpiece "L'isola disabitata"

SPORTS POLICY

Andrea Fischbacher and Jürgen Melzer: Athletes of the Year 2010
General Assembly of ÖPC 2010: starting to focus on London

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.

HOME AFFAIRS**Red-green coalition in Vienna**

Almost exactly one month after the regional elections in Vienna (10 October 2010), the Social Democrats (SPÖ) and Greens agreed on a coalition deal, paving the way for the first red-green government at regional level in Austria. Vienna's Mayor Michael Häupl and his new green Vice Mayor Maria Vassilakou presented the priorities of their joint government programme for the next five years in the City Hall on 12 November 2010. To conclude the deal, the formal approval of the respective party committees was required. On 14 November 2010 the regional assembly of the Greens voted with a large majority in favour of the collation agreement, the SPÖ adopted the paper one day later in its largest regional body, the "Vienna Committee". After meeting these requirements, the signing ceremony for the government agreement was held at "Roter Salon" in the City Hall. The first session of the Municipal Council has been scheduled for late November; the exact date has not been available at editorial close.

Greek-born Maria Vassilakou (41), who has been chairwoman of Vienna's Green Party, becomes Vienna's first Vice Mayor with a migration background. In the newly formed City Senate she will be responsible for transport and traffic, urban planning, climate protection and energy as well as citizen participation. Executive City Councillor without portfolio David Ellensohn will be appointed as the new chairman of Vienna's Green Party.

There will be no change in the SPÖ's team of executive city councillors except for incumbent Executive City Councillor for Transport and Traffic Rudolf Schicker, who will be replaced by Vassilakou. Renate Brauner remains Vice Mayor and Executive City Councillor for Finance. The City Senate will be downsized from 13 to 12 members; the SPÖ will have seven (previously eight) executive city councillors, the Freedom Party (FPÖ) three, while the Greens and People's Party (ÖVP) will have one city councillor each.

The red-green coalition plans key measures in the areas of integration, education, climate protection and the combat against poverty. In integration policy a "Vienna Charter of Coexistence" and a "Vienna Treaty" defining the rights and obligations of newcomers have been drafted. A new transport and traffic concept is to be developed by 2013, which will reduce private motor traffic by strengthening public transport and expanding cycle tracks.

Minister of Health Stöger advocates nationwide hospital reform

To curb the steadily increasing costs in the hospital sector, Minister of Health Alois Stöger plans a complete overhaul of the Austrian hospital system. The reform plans focus on the distribution of powers as well as the allocation of financial resources. The funds for hospitals are to be bundled and made available to the Länder only if they meet specific criteria. The Federal Republic should define uniform objectives for all of Austria, which are to be laid down in laws. According to Stöger's plan, the Länder are to receive less money than in the past if they fail to achieve these goals.

Nine different acts of the Länder also meant nine different and consequently more costly service portfolios, different rules for hospitals as well as different patient co-payment schemes, Stöger explained his call for a nationwide Hospital Act. The Federal Republic would be responsible for the whole spectrum of hospital planning (and issuing ordinances), while implementation remained the task of the Länder, stated Stöger. Federal government funds should no longer flow automatically to the hospitals but should be subject to specific conditions. Covering 65% of the expenditure, the health insurance institutions and the Federal Republic also wanted to participate in shaping the future development. The approach is based on developing qualitative and quantitative targets (needs assessment, definition of requirements for individual wards), laying down standards and creating synergies. No hospital closures were envisaged, stressed the Minister of Health. The main goal of his concept is to initiate a broad discussion with the parties, Länder and various interest groups.

Special police unit for eastern Austria achieved decrease in crime

"SOKO Ost", the special police unit set up to crack down on crime in eastern Austria, has been effective, consistent police action has decreased crime", emphasised Minister of the Interior Maria Fekter on 28 October 2010, presenting the evaluation results of a major operation of the special police unit in Vienna, Lower Austria and Burgenland. Between 1 July and 31 October 2010, 1,644 persons were arrested, 436 suspects were caught in the act, e.g. during burglaries or vehicle thefts. 1,178 people were arrested due to illegal migration and 30 persons were put into prison for violating administrative laws, Fekter summed up. Increased pressure from police investigation disturbed criminal structures, said Fekter.

EUROPE INTERNATIONAL**Federal President Fischer pays visit to South East Asia**

Federal President Heinz Fischer originally planned to pay official visits to the South East Asian countries Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore from 7 to 12 November 2010. Due to the ash cloud of the Indonesian volcano Merapi, he returned from Jakarta already on 10 November 2010.

His state visit to Malaysia, the first stop of his trip to South East Asia, took place according to schedule. The President was accompanied by his wife Margit and a large delegation, including Minister for Economic Affairs Reinhold Mitterlehner and Minister of Health Alois Stöger. Talks were held with King Mizan Zainal Abidin and Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin in Malaysia's capital Kuala Lumpur.

Fischer called for intensifying economic relations with the South East Asian countries. Austria was highly active in China, Japan and India but should also open up the "emerging economic area" South East Asia, Fischer told reporters. In particular hospital, environmental and infrastructure technologies offered good business opportunities to Austrian companies. He described the economic relations with Malaysia as "excellent", with the current trade volume totalling about 650 million euro.

In his speech to the Malaysian-Austrian Economic Forum the Federal President underlined that Austria – which by the way had always supported the forthcoming negotiations on a free trade agreement between the EU and Malaysia – was attractive to Malaysia as a "gate to Central and Eastern Europe" thanks to its location in the heart of Europe.

Both sides stressed that Malaysia acted as a bridge between Islam and the West. Fischer praised Malaysia and Indonesia as moderate Islamic countries rejecting fanaticism and terrorism and admitting other religions. In Austria interreligious dialogue was a "deeply rooted" practice which was "absolutely necessary" for mutual respect, emphasised Fischer.

The intensification of economic relations and the dialogue of religions were issues high on the agenda also in Indonesia. In Jakarta, the capital of the most densely populated Muslim country, Fischer met with his Indonesian counterpart Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Both sides reaffirmed their intention of strengthening the good bilateral relations, especially in the economic sector (environment, infrastructure, health sector).

Ukrainian Prime Minister Azarov meets with Federal Chancellor Faymann

Ukrainian head of government Mykola Azarov and Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann discussed opportunities for strengthening bilateral and economic cooperation at an official meeting in Vienna on 8 November 2010. Other subjects for debate were the relations between Ukraine and the EU as well as infrastructure projects in the framework of the European Football Championships EURO 2012, which will be hosted by Ukraine and Poland. Azarov's visit to Vienna was motivated by his participation in the Vienna Economic Forum (see Economy).

In the preliminaries of EURO 2012 taking place in Poland and Ukraine, Austrian Minister of the Interior Maria Fekter and Polish Deputy Minister of the Interior Adam Rapacki agreed to cooperate closely in security issues at a meeting held in Vienna on 4 November 2010.

Austria extends participation of the Federal Army in UN missions

On 9 November 2010, the federal government extended the Federal Army's participation in UN peacekeeping missions, e.g. in Kosovo, in Bosnia and in the Golan Heights, up to the end of 2011. With more than 1,000 soldiers, Austria is among the EU countries represented most strongly in these missions, stressed Minister of Defence Norbert Darabos. Austria's security policy continued to focus on the Balkans.

Foreign Minister Spindelegger at Danube Summit in Bucharest

To make the Danube region a pan-European concern had been their joint goal – and it has been achieved. At the "Danube Summit" in Bucharest on 8 November 2010, Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger was highly pleased that this Austrian-Romanian idea "developed into a European project for the future".

This recent meeting was another milestone on the road leading to a common EU strategy for the Danube area, stated Minister Spindelegger. This was the first time that all countries of the region – regardless if they were EU Member States or not – were involved in the development process from the very beginning.

According to Spindelegger, the cornerstones of the strategy were improved transport and infrastructure, sustainable protection of the ecosystem as well as increasing competitiveness.

ECONOMY**Chancellor Faymann: austerity programmes should not jeopardise growth**

Representatives of 44 countries of Eastern and South Eastern Europe, including Ukrainian Prime Minister Mykola Azarov and Bulgarian Energy Minister Traycho Traykov, participated in the 7th Vienna Economic Forum at Raiffeisenzentralbank in Vienna on 8 November 2010. Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann emphasised in his statement that the partnership with the countries of this region was decisive for the next generation. The consistent dialogue was vital in view of the different social-political conditions in the Eastern and South Eastern European countries to counter extremist forces and tackle the root causes of violence. “Anyone who wishes to sacrifice these partnerships frivolously, harms the European peace process“, stated Faymann.

During a crisis, austerity programmes should not lead to cuts in sectors that would ensure an economic upswing – this appeal by Faymann was also fully supported by Herbert Stepic, boss of Raiffeisenbank International (RBI). It was necessary to safeguard the living standard of the population and to take into account social balance. The purchasing power of the population and consequently economic growth should not be destroyed, stressed the Federal Chancellor.

Therefore, measures should above all focus on eliminating duplication in administration and on examining funding systems. In Austria cost savings amounted to only 1.7% on average, while other countries had to reduce spending by 4 to 5%, or even 15%. Austerity measures should by no means affect education, research and development as this would have immeasurable consequences for purchasing power and future growth, said Faymann.

Despite the exemplary euro-rescue umbrella amounting to 700 billion euro, “an adequate financial market architecture was still missing” in Europe. A strong European rating agency was required as a watchdog.

Austria has proven to be a reliable partner in Europe. Chancellor Faymann was therefore of the opinion that Austria was in a “good position” to cope with future challenges.

Austria grows more strongly than Germany and the EU

In summer, Austria’s economy grew more strongly than that of Germany and the euro-zone. In the third quarter of 2010, the gross domestic product (GDP) went up by 0.9%

from the level of the previous quarter. Based on currently available data, Austria and Slovakia recorded the third largest GDP growth over the previous quarter – behind Finland (+1.3%) and the Czech Republic (+1.1%). Germany achieved a plus of 0.7%, the euro-area and the EU grew by merely 0.4%.

A year-on-year comparison shows, however, that Germany – Europe’s largest economy – was again the growth engine, achieving +3.9%. The second largest European economy, France, attained a growth of only 0.4% from the previous quarter and of 1.8% year-on-year. Based on a flash estimate of the Economic Research Institute (Wifo) of 12 November 2010, Austria’s economic performance (GDP) rose by 2.4%.

According to Eurostat, the EU-27 grew by 2.1%, while the euro-zone registered a growth rate of 1.9%. In Greece, ranked last in the EU comparison, the economy shrank by 4.5% compared to 2009 and by 1.1% from the previous quarter. The data for Ireland are not yet available.

Metalworkers: real wages increase by 2.3 percent

The 165,000 workers of the metallurgical industry will benefit from a 2.5% increase in minimum wages (with retroactive effect as of 1 November 2010); real wages will go up by 2.3%. Thanks to a minimum amount of 45 euro, the increase in lower wages corresponds to up to 3%. The minimum wage increases slightly to 1,524 euro. Flourishing enterprises make another one-off payment amounting to between 50 and 150 euro, depending on their operating result. The wage agreements of the metal workers point the way for the wage negotiations in other sectors.

SMEs are the strong backbone of the economy

“According to the 2010 Report on SMEs“ of the Ministry for Economic Affairs, about 299,000 smaller and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) were active in Austria in 2009, these are 99.6% of all enterprises.

SMEs reported net sales totalling 405 billion euro as well as a gross value-added of about 99 billion euro. The number of employees in the sector was 1.8 million.

By European comparison, the SME sector also registers an above-average women’s share of 35%. Every third enterprise is run by a woman, compared to only 30.2% in the EU-27.

CULTURE MEDIA SCIENCE

Brecht on Vienna's theatre stages: author declared dead is remarkably lively

Brecht was “dead”, stage directors used to answer the question why they did not produce any of his allegedly ideology-laden plays with Marxist oversimplifications only some time ago in Austria. How fast times and views change: the international banking crisis, astronomical salaries and termination benefits for top managers, hair-raising financial transactions and corruption cases made public on a practically daily basis, the loss of seemingly safe jobs, social risks faced also by many well-qualified people, not to mention the population of large parts of the underdeveloped world, erosion of human relationships, devotion to diffuse salvation teachings – in brief, the drifting apart of rich and poor in a globalised world. In Austria, all of this has undoubtedly led to the reanimation of the playwright from Augsburg Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), who – besides the Viennese author Elfriede Jelinek (born in 1946) – is the writer in German language expressing the most radical social criticism. The European Capital of Culture Linz 09 had obviously ushered in a revival with two Brecht performances at Landestheater Linz. “The Good Person of Szechwan” was directed by Ong Keng Sen, who was born in China and grew up in Singapore. He had attracted attention already in 2005 with his production of “Der Kaukasische Kreidekreis” (“The Caucasian Chalk Circle”) at Schauspielhaus in Vienna. The second play shown in Linz, “Im Dickicht der Städte” (“In the Jungle of the Cities”), was produced by the experienced Brechtian director Matthias Langhoff (born in 1941). Unfortunately, the Austrian press had paid little tribute to their outstanding directing. Kurt Weill's and Bertolt Brecht's “Mahagonny Songspiel” (“Little Mahagonny”) of 1927 and the ballet chanté “Die sieben Todsünden” (“The Seven Deadly Sins”) of 1933 were shown only twice (!) in mid-October at Theater an der Wien. The latter was presented in the version produced in 2009 at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris – then managed by Vienna State Opera's current Director Dominique Meyer. The sung ballet was directed by Juliette Deschamps in Paris and in Vienna. In her quest for happiness Anna wanders around in the Cubist stage set by Nelson Wilmotte. A brutal and at the same time bigoted environment deformed her dreams in such a way that it seems pure mockery when they finally come true.

Angelika Kirchschrager sang the role of Anna in a beige leather coat and with a black fringe hairdo. In line with Weill's intention, she gave an operatic and jazzy performance – driven by a genuine passion that stands comparison with famous interpretations, e.g. by Lotte Lenya or Gisela May. The other singers like Simeon Esper, Yves Saelens, Holger Falk, Catherine Hunold and Graeme Broadbent were also ideal interpreters of Weill's/Brecht's bitter truths.

The ORF Radio Symphony Orchestra's rendering of the music – from waltz, foxtrot, marches, shimmy to Tarantella – was congenial. The top orchestra conducted by Walter Kobéra can in fact pride itself on a long experience in jazzy sound. The Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF) aired this spectacular performance on its radio station Ö1 on 6 November 2010.

Brecht has not been performed at Vienna's Burgtheater for more than ten years. “Die Heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe” (“Saint Joan of the Stockyards”) directed by Michael Thalheimer from Germany has been shown since 30 October 2010. The critics were divided on the performance, which was, however, cheered enthusiastically by the audience. Brecht wrote “Saint Joan of the Stockyards” in Berlin in 1929/30. The play received its world premier at Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg only in April 1959 – three years after the death of the author and with Brecht's daughter Hanne Hiob playing the title role.

Plot summary: In Chicago's meat industry prices collapse around 1900 due to overproduction. Meat king Pierpont Mauler withdraws his money from the business. His shares are taken over by Criddle on the condition that his competitor Lennox will be defeated. Nevertheless, the factories of Mauler and Criddle have to be shut down due to the crisis. Hundreds of thousands of workers lose their jobs – they participate in the events as a monolithic and powerful choir.

Johanna Dark of the salvation-army-like organisation “Black Straw Hats” cannot stop the growing misery of the starving workers. She asks Mauler for help who wants to show her that the poor themselves are responsible for their misery because they are evil. But in the slaughterhouse Joan realises that people are bad and vicious because they are poor. When the meat price drops to such a low level that a further decrease is practically impossible, Mauler re-enters the market, buying up all the meat and livestock. Joan understands only very late that Mauler's renewed monopoly will aggravate misery within a short time. She solid-

rises with the workers. But when a general strike inciting violence is called, Joan betrays her allies as she supports non-violence and was given wrong information. The strike is ended forcefully. Weary and suffering from pneumonia, Joan breaks down and acknowledges that “the luckless remain on the bottom so that the thriving top won’t topple”. She finds even more bitter words: “So anyone down here who says there is a God although there is none to be seen, and He can be invisible and help them all the same, should have his head banged on the pavement until he croaks“. But she speaks into a void, nobody is really listening.

The 25-year-old Joan Dark dies “in the service of God, a fighter and a sacrifice!“ All whisper pious words, also Mauler. There is no impediment to Joan’s canonisation, it is useful for the capitalists and clergymen.

Michael Thalheimer’s production captures the essence of Brecht’s play and is heavy like an ancient drama. The slaughterhouse stage (designed by Olaf Altmann) is austere and grey, in the background a lump of meat swings like a pendulum. The tinned meat producers and managers struggle, sweat, go berserk, together and against one another: Tilo Nest as the slimy meat king Mauler, Roland Koch as the fat and silky bureaucrat, Oliver Masucci embodying the cliché of the eternally tanned manager. Unpleasant, because she is poor and evil: Regina Fritsch in the role of a widow of a worker killed in an accident at the slaughterhouse.

Initially, Sarah Viktoria Frick as Joan seems naive, believing in the good of people. Joan’s personality is transformed by gradually heightened awareness. Her more intellectual frame of mind turns her into Mauler’s opponent, with whom she fights on equal terms.

Besides, Sarah Viktoria Frick received the prize for the “Best Newcomer” at the 11th Nestroy Gala at Vienna Burgtheater on 8 November 2010. www.burgtheater.at

No end of the current Brecht hype is in sight. On 19 November 2010, “Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti“ (“Herr Puntila and His Man Matti”), a parable about absolute power and subjugation, will be premiered at Volkstheater on 19 November 2010. www.volkstheater.at

SEZUAN.GUT.MENSCH: brilliant Brechtian play by bernhard ensemble

The “bernhard ensemble” named after Thomas Bernhard was founded by Grischka Voss and Ernst Kurt Weigel in 1997. The team of actresses and actors, musicians, authors and visual artists wants to “explore important and burning issues of our time on the stage”. A

permanent group of artists seemed desirable from the very beginning to develop an identifiable idiom. In 2006 a permanent performance venue was found in Vienna’s 7th district, Kirchengasse 41. The bernhard ensemble is “deeply convinced that really independent statements and developments are only possible in the independent theatre scene“. The members of the ensemble – notably Voss and Weigel – author the plays themselves or adapt the works of classical and contemporary authors to their needs: “We define ourselves as socio-critical observers trying to create public awareness of and understanding for the inhibited, the suppressed and the hidden“. The theatre group has exemplified this agenda for many years – also with texts by Herman Melville, Dario Fo or Arthur Schnitzler.

On many advertising pillars and billboards in Vienna a bright yellow and red poster – superbly drawn by actress Kristina Bangert – catches the eye: “SEZUAN.GUT.MENSCH. based on B. Brecht“. (The title does not only allude to the Good Person of Szechwan but also the pejorative term “do-gooders”.)

The theatre group does not present Brecht’s classic play of gods coming to Szechwan in China to find good people and to allow them live a decent life so that the world remains how it is. The only good person they finally discover is the prostitute Shen Te. After she fell in love with the unemployed mail pilot Yang Sun, she can, however, only survive in the guise of an invented evil cousin Shui Ta. Becoming pregnant, she can no longer work in her old job. The deceived society has no mercy for the unmasked. The gods permit the only good person they met to continue showing her evil side to survive and disappear.

The actors of the bernhard ensemble use this famous story only as a basic structure, rethinking and staging Brecht in present-day Vienna. Without sticking to his text, they developed a contemporary parable for the stage by improvising: Yang (resembling Shen Te) is a understanding, gentle male prostitute, Yin his hard business-minded sister. Besides the attractive-nonchalant and blind pilot, there is for example also a man “with migration background” from the Balkans, a pregnant woman from the Per-Albin-Hansson social housing estate in Vienna’s 10th district, who knows exactly how to get various social benefits, a bimbo girl taking foolishly about the general misery in the world; a neo-Nazi, who seems to be incredibly lonely behind his bold rhetoric and a small, frail God, who increasingly despairs over these people.

This performance is undoubtedly the most interesting play currently devoted to Brecht in Vienna – he would certainly have enjoyed it. Brecht said that the purpose of socially relevant art was to make visible “complicated processes”. And this is precisely what the bernhard ensemble does in this performance, which could have hardly been more compelling. A stroke of luck. www.off-theater.at or 0043/676 360 62 06.

Charity party: 25 years of Society for Threatened Peoples – Austria

In the framework of the charity event “Nyengida“ staged at 3-raum-anatomietheater in Vienna on 5 November 2010, tribute was paid to the Society for Threatened Peoples – Austria celebrating its 25th anniversary. “Nyengida“ means “celebration” in the language of the Tanzanian Barabaig people. The event was moderated by theatre manager Hubsli Kramar. Among the authors reading from their work were Turkish-Kurdish Nuran Ekingen and Congolese Espérance F. Ngayibata Bulayumi. Moreover, excerpts from “Little Alien“ was shown. In this documentary by Bosnian-Austrian filmmaker Nina Kusturica teenage refugees from international crisis hotspots tell their stories. The German-American artist and human rights activist Rebecca Sommer presented short videos about the combat of the indigenous people in Brazil against the Belo Monte dam project. The trio around the gorgeous signer Nataša Mirković-De Ro came from Sarajevo.

After the civil war in Nigeria, the German Society for Threatened Peoples was founded in the late 1960s, in 1985 the Austrian branch was established with the same mission. The Society is committed to underprivileged groups and minorities. The campaigns – also against government measures and entrepreneurial decisions perceived as morally questionable – range from signature collection and information of politicians to demonstrations. Moreover, the Society organises fund raising campaigns for smaller projects.

Besides PR work through press releases and member information, the magazine “Bedrohte Völker“ (“Threatened Peoples”) and the picture calendar “Lebenszeichen“ (“Signs of Life”) became a kind of trademark of the Society in Austria: Society for Threatened Peoples – Austria, A-1030 Vienna, Untere Viaduktgasse 53/7A, Tel./fax: 0043/1/503 49 90; e-mail: office@gfbv.at; bank and account number: PSK 7 238 909.

Kammeroper: Joseph Haydn’s masterpiece “L’isola disabitata”

For the puppet theatre at Palace of Eszterháza (today: Fertöd/Hungary) Joseph Haydn had created an “azione teatrale“ in 1779, a festive court play that was an exception among his opera gems. It was premiered on 6 December, the Saint’s Day of Prince Nikolaus under the peculiar title “L’isola disabitata“ (“The Desert Island”). The libretto was written by Pietro Metastasio, an author born in Rome, who had been court poet (poeta cesareo) at Vienna’s imperial court since 1729 – one of the ancestors, so to speak, of our Federal Press Service.

In his opera, that seems almost existentialist, Haydn devoted himself to an elemental force – love. Young Costanza (Eleni Voudouraki, mezzo-soprano) and her still rather child-like younger sister Silvia (Chiara Skerath, soprano) meditate melancholically about life. Having been left by her lover (but it was not his fault as it turns out later), Costanza advises Silvia not to fall in love as she wants to prevent her from being hurt by men. Suddenly two of that breed turn up – the blonde Enrico (Sebastian Huppmann, baritone) and then Gernando with black curly hair (Juraj Hollý, tenor), the bridegroom who had disappeared.

Silvia, who is completely inexperienced, immediately falls in love with Enrico, her feelings blind her. But Enrico is not aware how great her passion is because he is mainly preoccupied with himself and his role as Gernando’s superior helper. Gernando is obsessed with winning back Costanza’s heart but does not realise the great emotional damage he inflicted, probably unconsciously.

Four people on an uninhabited, desolate island, suffering from different delusions and obsessions making them lonely. Neither a duet nor a trio is sung, only a series of arias, one more beautiful and more fervent than the other. When they sing them, the protagonists open up their souls for a moment. At the end, the four voices finally sing together. It remains open whether the couples will come together.

The opera was performed only very rarely – for example at Vienna’s Court Opera House in 1909. In 2009 a critical edition of the original text of the exceptional work was published, on which the performance at Vienna’s Chamber Opera (Wiener Kammeroper) has been based. The singers are outstanding. The deliberately sparing orchestration is performed with virtuosity by the orchestra of the Chamber Opera conducted by Daniel Hoyem-Cavazza.

www.wienerkammeroper.at

SPORTS POLICY**Andrea Fischbacher and Jürgen Melzer: Athletes of the Year 2010**

The “Gala Night of Sport” hosted by the Austrian Lotteries took place in the usual glamorous setting at the Vösendorf Event Pyramid on 3 November 2010. When Austrian sports reporters selected the male and female “Athletes of the Year”, some favourites prevailed but there were also a number of surprises. Minister of Sport Norbert Darabos handed over an “Athlete of the Year” trophy to tennis ace Jürgen Melzer, who had caused a sensation this year when he made it to the semi-finals at the French Open, won the men’s doubles title in Wimbledon and triumphed at the tournament at Stadthalle in Vienna. But this was not totally unexpected by many fans. Darabos stated at the award ceremony: “Jürgen Melzer’s achievements as well as the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Vancouver were among the absolute highlights of the sports year 2010“. Consequentially, super-G Olympic winner Andrea Fischbacher was also awarded the title “Athlete of the Year”.

When it came to selecting athletes with disabilities, the sports reporters decided in favour of Paralympics double gold medal winner Claudia Lösch and European champion and shot put world record setter Georg Tischler. Triple gold medallist Thomas Praxmarer became the winner in the category “Special Olympics“. “Especially the achievements of our athletes with handicaps prove the immense diversity of sport in Austria”, stated Darabos. “I congratulate our athletes with disabilities really very cordially on their unbelievable accomplishments.“

The only fifteen-year-old golfer Matthias Schwab succeeded in becoming number one in the category “Promising New Talent“. Despite very strong competitors, the title “Team of the Year” went to the team of the Austrian Skiing Association (ÖSV) winning the Olympic Nordic combined team event – Felix Gottwald as well as army athletes Mario Stecher, Bernhard Gruber and David Kreiner.

Ski jumping legend Anton Innauer, who received the “Special Award” for his lifetime achievements in sport, was the object of enthusiasm exceeding all bounds: “Today I realised once more that this sports-crazed audience is a family.“

At the end of the gala, Minister of Sport Darabos looked back on extremely favourable results: “In the sports year 2010 we have again seen a number of really outstanding triumphs

by Austrian athletes. I am especially pleased about the fact that these achievements were made in such a wide range of disciplines. As a minister of sport, I consider it crucial to reinforce this trend and to create a really broad basis for top performance“.

General Assembly of ÖPC 2010: starting to focus on London

The 6th General Assembly of the Austrian Paralympic Committee (ÖPC) was held in Vienna on 11 November 2010. The General Assembly was also attended by Claudia Lösch, Austria’s most successful athlete at the Paralympic Winter Games in Vancouver 2010 and recently selected “Athlete with a Disability of the Year 2010“. After the resignation of Manfred Auer, the previous representative of winter athletes in the ÖPC Managing Board, Claudia Lösch will represent the interests of the winter athletes in this body.

Eleven medals (3 x gold, 4 x silver, 4 x bronze) were won by Austria at the Paralympics in Vancouver 2010. Despite an increasingly stiffer international competition, Austria was ranked 7th in the medals table.

Six out of a total of 19 Austrian athletes brought home the coveted medals from Canada: Claudia Lösch (gold in slalom and super-G, silver in the super combined and bronze in the women’s downhill at the Alpine skiing competitions of sitting athletes), Sabine Gasteiger with guide Stefan Schoner (gold in slalom and silver in the giant slalom of visually impaired Alpine athletes), Robert Meusburger (silver in the giant slalom of standing Alpine athletes), Jürgen Egle (silver in the super combined of sitting Alpine athletes), Philipp Bonadimann (bronze in slalom and in the super combined of sitting Alpine athletes) and Hubert Mandl (bronze in the super-G event of standing Alpine athletes).

The ÖPC is focusing already on the future, namely the forthcoming Paralympic Summer Games, which will be opened in London at the end of August 2012.

Other sports also face interesting developments – Para-golf, Para-snowboard and standing ice hockey – apply for admission to the Paralympic Summer and Winter Games. Together with the national and regional committees, the International Paralympic Committee will promote the further development and professionalisation of high-performance sports for athletes with disabilities.