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HOME AFFAIRS**Federal government calls for bank tax**

The federal government plans to introduce a bank tax in the near future – this is the result of a bank summit chaired by Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann on 22 February 2010. A study presented by the Austrian National Bank (OeNB) served as the basis and starting point for the summit, in which Minister of Finance Josef Pröll as well as the heads of Austria's large banks and banks relevant to the banking system participated.

The details of the proposed tax have not yet been fixed. The tax would not be introduced before 2011. The Chancellor stated that the expected revenue was about 500 million euro. A tax rate of 0.07 % to 0.1% would be applied to the balance-sheet total minus various deductions (e.g. core capital, SMEs, private business). Faymann emphasised that it was absolutely justified to claim this sum from the banks in the form of a solidarity tax.

It was completely out of the question that this bank tax would be passed on to the banks' customers, Faymann and Pröll stressed unanimously. Bank fees would be monitored closely to prevent this. In addition, competition among banks was expected to help in this respect, explained Faymann. The new working group chaired by the Chancellor will meet for the first time on 8 March 2010. The task of this group composed by representatives of the government and the banks will be to develop proposals and expert opinions for the government. In a debate on current issues of the National Council on 24 February 2010, Pröll reiterated his "clear commitment" to the need that all spheres of society, including the banks, made a fair contribution to budget consolidation. According to him, speculative banking products, e.g. derivative financial instruments and off-balance-sheet transactions, could be used as a basis for the planned bank tax. In media interviews Pröll also demanded that the introduction of the planned bank tax should be paralleled by the abolishment of the fee on loan agreements. This would help to reduce the financial burden on private consumers and entrepreneurs. The tax authorities had reaped about 150 million euro per year from the loan agreement fee. These two measures would be a "win-win situation" for everybody, said Pröll.

Wifo: budget consolidation proposals

The Economic Research Institute (Wifo) estimated that cost-savings of about 10 billion

euro had to be made by 2010 to curb the soaring budget deficit. On 22 February 2010, the Wifo experts presented a report on budget consolidation options. Based on it, short-time cost-savings of up to 2.9 billion euro were possible (as from 2011). The annual interest (currently 7.5 billion euro per year) paid on the government debt could be reduced by privatisation receipts. In addition, higher taxes could be imposed on assets, energy, alcohol, tobacco and gambling.

Once budget consolidation was completed, the money should be used for decreasing incidental wage costs and wage tax. Together with the planned cost-savings of 10 billion euro, the deficit would drop from 4.7% of the GDP this year to 2.7% by 2013. This would again be in line with the EU deficit target (below 3%).

In concrete terms, the experts recommend measures to stabilise growth and to create jobs (e.g. thermal rehabilitation, educational reform, childcare, research), an administrative reform (stronger cooperation of local authorities, flexible employment law for civil servants, new financial equalisation system), new subsidy structures (no double subsidies) as well as a health reform (less acute care beds, transparent hospital financing). In view of employment policy, Wifo rejects higher mass taxes, e.g. value-added tax or social insurance contributions. The Chancellor clearly stated that an increase of value-added tax was "unthinkable".

Government meeting in Graz

From 1 to 2 March 2010, the governing parties – Social Democrats (SPÖ) and the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) – hold their third closed-door meeting in Graz (Styria). Key issues are employment (focusing on youth and apprenticeships) as well as education and research.

Former Women's Minister Dohnal died

Icon of the Austrian women's policy Johanna Dohnal (71) has died of a heart disease in her home in Waldviertel (Lower Austria) on 20 February 2010. Bruno Kreisky had made the politician born in Vienna a member of his cabinet in 1979, appointing her SPÖ Secretary of State for Women's Affairs. In the government of Chancellor Franz Vranitzky Dohnal became Austria's first Minister for Women's Affairs in 1990 (up to 1995). President Heinz Fischer praised Dohnal as a "courageous pioneer of women's rights and gender equality". She was a politician achieving "great things for the people in Austria – especially the women in this country", stated Chancellor Faymann.

EUROPE ■ INTERNATIONAL**Federal Chancellor Faymann at EU Danube summit in Budapest**

On 25 February 2010, Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann participated in a summit meeting on the EU Danube Region Strategy in Budapest. The 14 Danube countries, the European Commission and representatives of regional and local authorities, among them the Länder Vienna, Lower Austria and Burgenland, were invited to the meeting. Besides Faymann, Hungarian Prime Minister Gordon Bajnai also welcomed the heads of government of Romania, Bulgaria and Moldova as well as the Austrian EU Commissioner for Regional Policy, Johannes Hahn.

Faymann underlined that joint action to tackle the economic crisis posed also a key challenge to the Danube Region. The Federal Chancellor underlined that extensive cooperation at EU level was indispensable, above all to cope with the social impact of the economic crisis.

The heads of government agreed to support the European Commission in drafting the Strategy for the Danube Region by the end of the year. Three priorities have been envisaged for future EU engagement in the Danube region: improved connectivity of the Danube regions in the areas of transport, energy and information technology; the environment, including core issues such as water quality, biodiversity and risk prevention; as well as socio-economic integration.

Austria applies for seat on UN Human Rights Council

Austria will apply for a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council. The respective document was passed by the Council of Ministers on 23 February 2010. In this way, Austria wanted “to pursue its particular commitment to human rights, the rule of law and the protection of the civilian population in the framework of our membership in the Security Council vigorously in the next years”, Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger told reporters. The UN Human Rights Council elections will take place in May 2011. The institution existing since 2006 has 47 members. The seats will be awarded for a period of three years.

Spindelegger in the Middle East

During his visit to Ramallah, his first stop on his several-day tour to the Middle East (16 to 20 February 2010), the Foreign Minister reaffirmed Austria’s position that there was no

alternative to an Israeli-Palestinian two-state solution. Austria supported the “legitimate aspirations for an independent Palestinian state coexisting in peace with Israel“. It was necessary to start negotiations with the Palestinians or with Syria without conditions, Spindelegger stated in a comment directed at Israel and with reference to close consultation with the EU and the USA.

With a secret message of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, which presumably addressed the forthcoming indirect negotiations between the Palestinians and Israel, Minister Spindelegger travelled on to Israel. In Jerusalem the Austrian Foreign Minister met inter alia with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Simon Peres, informing them of Austria’s intensive efforts to be “helpful” in the Middle East with a view to initiating a peace process (for the entire region). Israel had recognised Austria’s role, said Spindelegger. The Foreign Minister laid a wreath at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial.

With another message, this time from Israel, Spindelegger continued his Middle East tour in the Lebanon and Syria. In Beirut he led talks with Lebanese President Michel Sleimane and Prime Minister Saad Hariri. Spindelegger described the Lebanese government as “solid” and the country as “democratically stable”. In Damascus, which was the last destination of this trip, the Foreign Minister emphasised vis-à-vis reporters that demonstrating full cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was in the interest of Syria. However, the human rights situation “continued to be cause for concern“.

Federal President Fischer: “Poverty is a global subject”

The “European Year for Combating Poverty” was officially launched in Salzburg on 22 February 2010. Based on estimates, 1 million people in Austria are considered to be at risk of poverty, half a million was manifestly poor. Federal President Heinz Fischer therefore demanded that society had to “take corrective action” when the income gap threatened to become “irrational”, bearing no relation to differences in productivity.

Auschwitz: 6 million euro from Austria

As Minister of Finance Josef Pröll informed, Austria will make available 6 million euro for restoring the memorial site at the former Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland.

ECONOMY**Pröll and Mitterlehner in India**

Minister of Finance Josef Pröll and Minister for Economic Affairs Reinhold Mitterlehner were accompanied by a high-ranking delegation of 45 representatives of Austrian companies during their official visit to India (17 to 20 February 2010). Alongside with China, India is considered to be one of the main growth hopes of the global economy. Consequently, it is also a promising market for Austria. This does not only apply to exports but also to the establishment of Indian companies generating value-added in Austria.

In view of a projected economic growth of about 7.2% and the growing goods trade with Austria, the Indian subcontinent offers enormous opportunities to domestic companies, e.g. in sectors like infrastructure, car production or energy. "We have doubled our presence in the past four years, but there is still a lot of unused potential which we should take advantage of", stressed Mitterlehner, who believes that there are particularly good export opportunities for Austrian environmental and energy technologies.

In New Delhi the two ministers were received by the Indian Vice President Shri Mohammad Hamid Ansari. Together with Minister for Industry and Trade Anand Sharma, they opened a large industrial fair. Other meetings were held with the Ministers for Finance, Health, Transport and Renewable Energies.

Their official programme also included visits to a number of Austrian companies successfully operating in India, among them the high-tech engine and test system producer AVL List headquartered in Graz. About 300 employees are active in the development of software as well the testing of engines in three Indian AVL plants. Another exemplary Austrian enterprise in India is Andritz Hydro, previously VA Tech Hydro. The company had been awarded its first contract in India already in 1902. Since then it has participated in all important invitations to tender, as Hydro manager Alexander Schwab confirmed vis-à-vis the Austrian Press Agency (APA). Andritz Hydro employs 500 people in two factories.

Wienerberger, the globally largest producer of bricks and the number two in clay roof tiles in Europe, is represented with a brick factory south of Bangalore. Other Austrian industrial enterprises are RHI, supplying blast furnace components to the Indian steel industry, or the Styrian printed-circuit-board manufacturer

AT&S, currently investing 15 million euro into expanding its factory in Najangud in South India. Austrian companies have so far invested an official amount of 130 million euro in India. India is highly interested in Austria as a film location. About 100 Indian films have been realised in Austria – particularly in Tyrol and Salzburg – in the past ten years. In some cases the daily expenditure of large film productions amounted to about 15,000 euro. The recently launched public funding model "Film Location Austria", for which 20 million euro have been made available, will support more coproductions between Austrian and foreign film companies. This was the background of a meeting of Pröll and Mitterlehner with Indian film producers. Oscar-winner Stefan Ruzowitzky ("The Counterfeiters") and Veit Heiduschka, producer of the film "The White Ribbon", participated in the meeting as renowned representatives of the Austrian film industry.

New strategy to promote tourism

Minister for Economic Affairs and Tourism Reinhold Mitterlehner presented the new Austrian strategy to promote tourism in Innsbruck on 26 February 2010. The aim was not to change everything, but to improve a lot, explained Mitterlehner. The Minister pointed out that in Austria very often tourism was based on outdated, instead of modern, models. Mitterlehner deplored the lack of investments and innovation, especially in summer tourism. Under the motto "New vistas for tourism", the new strategy for tourism therefore targeted five areas: better coordination of marketing activities, more innovation, well-aimed subsidies, improved infrastructure and a more favourable framework for enterprises.

The Austrian Tourist Office ("Österreich Werbung"), the Länder and the 450 tourist associations should cooperate more closely in organisational, thematic and strategic terms, said Mitterlehner. Joint efforts were indispensable for reaching the critical levels aspired by foreign tour operators. To use funds more efficiently and to strengthen Austria's positioning as a holiday country, Mitterlehner suggested to concentrate on three "unique selling propositions": the Alps, the Danube & lakes, cities and culture. An example of measures presented by Mitterlehner were non-repayable subsidies of 10,000 euro for investments into bicycle tourism. The total amount of 1.5 million euro earmarked for this purpose had been used up after only four months. All-year tourism is to be strengthened on this basis.

CULTURE ■ MEDIA ■ SCIENCE

New ORF law: only austerity guarantees independence

The Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF) will be subject to more stringent economic and strategic controls by the ORF Foundation Council and the new Media Authority. On the other hand, the public broadcaster will receive a generous partial compensation for the loss of income due to TV fee exemptions. “The ORF will need 160 million euro to fulfil its tasks in the next four years”, said Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann after the meeting of the Council of Ministers on 23 February 2010. “This amount is made available to guarantee the independence of the ORF and support it in performing its manifold tasks“. These are for example to promote film productions, to ensure the continued existence of the Radio Symphony Orchestra (RSO) as well as to safeguard a specific minimum share of Austrian productions in the programme. “The recent past has clearly shown how important film funding is“, said the Federal Chancellor, obviously alluding to the international success of Austrian filmmakers.

The new ORF Act guarantees the continuation of the special-interest TV channels “Sport plus” and “TW1” focusing on culture and news. Moreover, 45 percent of all vacancies of the ORF have to be filled with women – except in the ORF executive bodies and management. According to the government’s proposal for the ORF Act adopted by the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) and the People’s Party (ÖVP), the Foundation Council – previously the highest supervisory body of the ORF – will have to share its supervisory responsibilities with the new Regulatory Agency. More stringent controls of the ORF’s financial management have been demanded particularly by the ÖVP.

In accordance with the draft of the coalition, the ORF will have “to take structural measures to achieve a substantial reduction of the cost base in the medium term“. As from 2010 onwards the ORF Director-General will have to submit an annual plan for approval by the ORF Foundation Council. This plan will cover measures, indicators and targets regarding the reduction of personnel (including cuts in capacities and per-capita costs) and of material costs not directly related to investments in channels as well as regarding the optimisation of the technology and infrastructure modernisation process. The Foundation Council has to adopt these measures and forward them to a

Review Committee set up by the new Media Authority. According to the new law, the ORF Director-General has “to establish credibly that the measures, indicators and targets adopted are appropriate to ensure a break-even result on ordinary activities in the medium term“.

If the Review Committee raises objections, the ORF management and the Foundation Council have to reconsider and revise the set of measures. The final report or final recommendations of the Review Committee are then submitted to the Media Authority. Acting as the last instance, it will examine compliance with the legal requirements. The Media Authority will also check whether the ORF realised all measures and terms stipulated as a prerequisite for the financial compensation for fee exemptions in the preceding calendar year. The Media Authority reports its decision to the Minister of Finance. In the current year, the ORF will receive the financial compensation by 31st July at the latest. Between 2011 and 2013 the Ministry of Finance will transfer the additional funds to the ORF only after the Media Authority has given the green light.

After the coalition government reached an agreement on the proposed ORF Act, the draft is submitted to Parliament. The opposition parties have to be convinced of the bill, which can be passed only with a two-thirds majority. Vice Chancellor and Minister of Finance Pröll stressed that the discussion would not be easy but that the opposition parties also had to assume responsibility for the independence of the ORF. “We are interested in implementing the ORF Act as quickly as possible“, added the Chancellor. “I am always ready to engage in discussions when it helps to reach a consensus“. In parallel to funding the ORF, the government will also triple the financial resources for private broadcasting stations in the next years.

Chancellor Faymann pays homage to the life and work of Bruno Gironcoli

Austrian sculptor Bruno Gironcoli has died after a long, serious illness at the hospital “Rudolfstiftung” in Vienna on 19 February 2010. He is considered one of the most important protagonists of Austrian contemporary art. He headed the sculpture masterclass at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna since 1977, succeeding to Fritz Wotruba. When he retired in 2004, a new home had to be found for his sculptures – often monumental works, in which every-day objects, human bodies and allusions to nature are blended into highly

symbolic compositions – previously stored in his studio at the Academy. The Gironcoli Museum in the Palace of Herberstein (Styria) was opened in 2004, which also accommodates his collection of African masks and objects.

Numerous honours were bestowed on Bruno Gironcoli, among them the Badge of Honour for Science and Art as well as the Grand Austrian State Prize. Deeply shocked by the death of the artist born in Villach (Carinthia), Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann said: “With the death of Bruno Gironcoli, Austria has lost one of the most eminent and important contemporary artists, whose work has had an impact beyond the borders of our country“. He had set “decisive milestones in visual art“. Minister of Culture Claudia Schmied stated that Gironcoli had tried “to depict and unmask the horrors and deceits of the present, more than any other modern artist“.

Due to the huge dimension of the objects, solo exhibitions of Gironcoli’s work were rare. Just within Vienna, it took fourteen nights to transport sixteen sculptures in special trucks for the exhibition “The Unborn” at the Museum of Applied Arts (MAK) in 1997. The solo exhibition devoted to him at the Austrian Pavilion at the 50th Venice Biennale was the most important international presentation of his oeuvre.

Belvedere commemorates 30th anniversary of the death of Oskar Kokoschka

On 22 February 2010, the 30th anniversary of the death of Oskar Kokoschka was commemorated. To mark the occasion, Upper Belvedere paid tribute to the multi-faceted oeuvre of one of Austria’s greatest artists in a special presentation of selected works from the gallery’s own collection (on show from 22 February to 22 April 2010).

O.K. disassociated himself early from the art movement “Wiener Secession” around Gustav Klimt and Carl Moll, who were to remain his supporters. After his scandal-prone debut at the “Kunstschau“ (“Art Show”) in Vienna in 1908, he soon developed a very characteristic, expressive position for which he won international renown. By moving to Dresden and cooperating with Herwarth Walden’s Berlin-based gallery “Der Sturm“ (“The Tempest”), Kokoschka consolidated his position within the expressive avant-garde art movement. After 1934, his escape and emigration ushered in a new artistic phase. Having been defamed as a “degenerate artist” by the Nazis, he fled from Prague to London.

Large solo exhibitions were staged in Vienna, Munich and the Hague in the late 1950s. To celebrate Kokoschka’s 85th birthday, a retrospective with more than 260 works was presented in the Austrian Gallery Belvedere in 1971.

The exceptional artists born in Pöchlarn (Lower Austria) died in Switzerland in 1980. www.belvedere.at

Austrian State Prize for Literary Translation 2009

The Austrian State Prizes for Literary Translation granted by the Federal Ministry of Education, Art and Culture go to the Austrian translator Heinrich Eisterer and the Dutch translator Nelleke van Maaren, who has also received the Dutch State Prize for Translation in 2010. The award ceremony takes place in the framework of the event “Translatio” organised at the Robert Musil House in Klagenfurt on 20 June 2010 – in the preliminaries of the Ingeborg Bachmann competition.

Nelleke van Maaren is awarded the Austrian State Prize 2009 for her translation of Austrian literature into Dutch, including works by Melitta Breznik, Heimito von Doderer, Norbert Gstrein, Leo Perutz and Raoul Schrott.

Heinrich Eisterer receives the Austrian State Prize 2009 for his translations of Hungarian literary works into German, e.g. by Laszlo Darvasi, Imre Kertész, Peter Nádas and Sándor Márei.

In recognition of special achievements in literary translation, the Federal Ministry of Education, Art and Culture annually grants State Prizes for the translation of Austrian literature into a foreign language as well as for the translation of foreign-language literature into German. The winners of the State Prizes for Literary Translation are selected on the recommendation of an expert committee. Additional cash prizes are granted for outstanding translations of literary works. The jury awarded prizes for a total of 27 translations, including 16 translations of the works of contemporary Austrian literature into foreign languages and 11 translations of foreign-language works into German. Minister of Culture Claudia Schmied: “I am pleased about the great interest in and commitment to contemporary Austrian literature also in the non-German speaking world, which is expressed particularly through the work of the translators. I am also happy about the fact that this important work serving the goal of transmitting culture is given adequate recognition by granting these awards and prizes. The

fact that by selecting Nelleke van Maaren and Heinrich Eisterer the State Prizes for Literary Translation (founded in 1985) went for the first time to translators into Dutch and from Hungarian, respectively, is much applauded”.

Fryderyk Chopin is celebrated in Austria, too

This year more than 2,700 events will be staged around the globe to celebrate the 200th birthday of Fryderyk Chopin – which, depending on the source, was on 22 February or on 1 March. This was a very good time to re-examine the music created by this “world composer”, who was also a “factor constituting Polish identity“, stated Polish Ambassador to Austria Jerzy Margański in Vienna recently. Now the moment had come to breathe “fresh air into our perception of Chopin“, the diplomat added.

Austria will celebrate the composer extensively throughout the year – in concerts, symposia and exhibitions. The Chopin Year was ushered in with the Vienna Opera Ball, on 20 and 21 February 2010 Daniel Barenboim expressed his admiration for Chopin at Musikverein. Other top-class Chopin recitals were given for example by Maurizio Pollini or Rudolf Buchbinder.

The official Chopin Year opening concert performed by Sinfonietta Cracovia took place at Vienna’s City Hall on 25 February 2010. In early March, the House of Music opened the exhibition “Chopin in Vienna“. An audio book combining compositions conceived or created in Vienna with letters read by Burgtheater actor Nicholas Ofczarek explores the same theme. From 19 to 21 April 2010 a symposium will focus on the importance of Vienna for the creator of modern piano music.

Chopin will be represented prominently in the concert programmes of various summer festivals – from the Reichenau Summer Academy to the Salzburg Festival. Some festivals, such as the now legendary Chopin Festival at the Gaming Charterhouse in Lower Austria (12 to 15 August 2010), “Chopin and Contemporary Music“ in the House of Music in Vienna (16 to 19 September 2010) or at the Vienna-based jazz club Porgy & Bess (23 to 26 September 2010), as well as numerous other programmes featuring Chopin, e.g. at Vienna’s Konzerthaus, explore special aspects of the composer’s oeuvre.

The Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF) broadcasts Chopin programmes throughout the year 2010. The TV channel ORF 2 shows for

example documentaries about Chopin’s Polish background (“Warsaw and Krakow“) as well as about the shy, sensitive personality of the artist. Pianists will talk about “their“ Chopin in the programme “Radiokolleg“ of the radio station Ö 1.

A guide through the events of the Chopin Year 2010 in Austria may be downloaded by clicking on www.chopin2010.at;

for an overview of international Chopin events see <http://chopin2010.pl>.

Karl Lueger symposium and Vienna Lecture at Vienna’s City Hall

Karl Lueger – Vienna’s mayor from 1897 to 1910 – died on 10 March 1910. His term of office was characterised by numerous large municipal housing projects that were predominantly financed through credits. Among these projects was the construction of the 2nd Vienna water supply pipeline coming from mountain springs; gas and electricity supplies as well as trams came under municipal control. Lueger also created social institutions such as the Lainz Care Centre or the Psychiatric Hospital “Am Steinhof”.

Under his leadership, the Christian Social Party developed into an important political force in Austria. Lueger still sparks controversy for having used massive anti-Semitic propaganda in the political arena. He owed his electoral successes in Vienna also to suffrage based on electoral classes and on ownership of property. Still before WWI, the Social Democratic Party, which he used to fight fiercely, won an absolute majority of votes, but remained excluded from municipal government responsibilities until 1919 due to specificities of the electoral law. Hundreds of thousands of Austrians participated in Lueger’s funeral, among them also the young Adolf Hitler.

The publication of a new Lueger biography by US historian John Boyer encourages a comprehensive academic discussion.

The symposium at Vienna’s City Hall on 10 March 2010 will examine Karl Lueger from various perspectives. John Boyer will lecture on “Lueger and the ambivalent models of Vienna“. Vienna’s Mayor Michael Häupl and Executive Councillor for Culture Andreas Mailath-Pokorny invite to a Vienna Lecture (“Wiener Vorlesung“) on “Karl Lueger and his epoch“, a panel discussion with the US historian moderated by Oliver Rathkolb, contemporary historian at the University of Vienna.

www.wienervorlesungen.at,

www.wienbibliothek.at.

SPORTS POLICY**Darabos acknowledges Austria's good performance at Olympic Games**

Minister of Sport Norbert Darabos assessed the performance of the Austrian athletes at the XXI. Olympic Winter Games in Vancouver, which had ended on 28 February 2010, quite positively.

Darabos: "In the past two weeks, our athletes allowed us to share their outstanding achievements, moments of excitement, joy, disappointment and team spirit. As Minister of Sport, I would like to congratulate the entire Austrian team cordially on the accomplishments in Vancouver. In more than half of the sports disciplines in which Austrian athletes participated, they were ranked among the top three. Every fourth athlete in the Austrian team travels home with at least one medal. In my capacity as Minister of Defence, I am also proud that nine Federal Army athletes are among the medallists.

The performance of some athletes in Vancouver was "historic". Andrea Fischbacher, for example, produced the race of her life in the women's super-G, leaving behind all the top favourites. The brothers Andreas and Wolfgang Linger won gold in the luge double for the second time in a row, which is rare at Olympic Games. Our ski jumpers, combiners and also biathletes showed impressively that Austria attaches great importance to team sports.

Besides 16 medals, numerous rankings among the top ten were achieved. This demonstrates the strength of the team competing under the red-white-red flag. The majority of male participants in Alpine events also boasts excellent results. Unfortunately the men were not lucky enough to finish on the podium. We are pleased about the fact that thanks to their achievements our figureheads in the young and trendy disciplines ski cross and snowboarding succeeded in turning the spotlight on youth sports.

The entire Austrian team was noted for its professional presentation as well as its spirit of fair play in view of the success of their rivals. Our team was, so to speak, the calling card presented by the sports and tourist country Austria to the world – all of them played their exemplary role with flying colours.

I would also like to thank the professionals around our team, all the trainers and coaches, the officials and organisers, whose firm commitment allows us to create an optimal frame-

work for top achievements. Last but not least, I thank the host Canada for the genuine hospitality and the respect shown."

Darabos met with IOC President Rogge

Minister of Sport Darabos attended the Olympic Games in Vancouver in the first week of the competitions as the official representative of the Republic of Austria. On the sidelines of the sports events, the Federal Minister took advantage of his stay in Canada to conduct intensive bilateral talks.

Besides meeting his counterparts, Darabos also held talks with President of the International Olympic Committee Jacques Rogge.

The Belgian praised Austria for its strict anti-doping policy of the past few years. The talks focused on the Winter Youth Olympics, which will be held in Innsbruck/Tyrol in 2012. The preparations for this top event are already in full swing.

ORF Sport Plus secured for the future

In late February, the Council of Ministers passed the amendment to the Act on the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF). Minister of Sport Norbert Darabos has been waging the campaign for securing the continuation of the TV channel "ORF Sport Plus" on the basis of the amendment. The Minister succeeded – the continuation of the special-interest channel for sport was enshrined in the law in the context of guaranteeing 160 million euro to the ORF as a partial financial compensation for the income loss caused by households exempted from TV fees. Payment of the compensation has been subject to conditions such as the continued provision of services by ORF Sport Plus, the preservation of the Radio Symphony Orchestra or a stronger emphasis on domestic productions.

Minister of Sport Darabos: "This is a great success in the interest of Austrian sport. For many sports clubs and associations the continuation of ORF Sport Plus is absolutely vital, especially in difficult economic times. Sports such as volleyball, handball, judo or table tennis are not covered adequately by the two main channels. ORF Sport Plus guarantees broad coverage of domestic sports – from Austrian sport achievements to the transmission of major sports events in Austria." After the European Handball Championships, which had been broadcast predominantly by ORF Sport Plus, Austria was in a state of "handball euphoria".