

## NEWS FROM AUSTRIA

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## HOME AFFAIRS

### **Chancellor Faymann: enshrining the debt brake in the Constitution**

Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann and Vice Chancellor Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger pled once more for enshrining the debt brake in the Austrian Constitution as quickly as possible at a special session of the National Council on 14 December 2011.

The coalition partners – the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) and the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) – have already passed a simple law on the debt brake on 6 December 2011. Since then intensive talks have been held as, in a second step, this law is to be granted constitutional status. Since the recent EU crisis summit in Brussels (12 December 2011), the government leaders have been arguing in favour of this measure by referring to the EU's fiscal pact providing for a debt brake in the euro-zone countries.

The positional debt limit would provide Austria with a sound basis for taking adequate measures in the future. "We need this foundation for a predictable economic policy. We must not leave the country's future at the mercy of the financial markets", said Faymann. The necessary consolidation measures for the budget 2012 should be taken by April.

### **Federal government adopted reform of the administrative courts**

The federal government adopted the reform of the administrative courts at a meeting of the Council of Ministers on 13 December 2011. The reform replaces about 120 appellate senates and special agencies (not subject to instructions of the ministry) by nine regional administrative courts and two equivalent federal institutions, i.e. a total of 11 courts. Furthermore, the Federal Office for Asylum and Migration will be set up; it is expected to start operating in 2013.

Chancellor Werner Faymann referred to "the most comprehensive reform of the legal protection system since the Federal Constitution". It would ensure faster procedures and slimmer structures, said Faymann. According to Vice Chancellor Michael Spindelegger, the reform of the administrative courts also enhanced Austria's position as a business location.

### **Assistance mission of Federal Army in Burgenland came to an end**

The assistance mission of the Austrian Federal Army in Burgenland came to an official end on 14 December 2011. After 21 years, the Federal

Army withdrew from Austria's eastern border region. Minister of Defence Norbert Darabos stated that the assistance mission was now "part of the Austrian history". It was concluded "not without melancholy" but "we withdraw with a clear conscience, we hand over responsibility to the Ministry of the Interior, we are aware of the fact that we have achieved something good and important for Austria with our security policy during the last 21 years", said Darabos at a press conference at the Martin Military Barracks in Eisenstadt.

For two decades, the soldiers had made a decisive contribution to the security of the population of the border area and of the entire Austrian territory, stated Darabos.

### **Income: women are lagging behind men**

According to the latest data of the Austrian Statistical Office (Statistik Austria), the median annual gross income of female employees still corresponds to merely 60% of the income of men. In 2010 women earned a median income of 8,270 euro, while that of men amounted to 30,316 euro. Based on a comparison of the income of year-round full-time employees, women achieved 81% of the earnings of men. Top wages and salaries of more than 500,000 euro were paid almost exclusively to male employees.

The gender income gap is significantly wider in the private sector than in the civil service. With an annual gross pay of 10,492 euro, female blue-collar workers earn only about 44% of the income of men. Female employees – representing the largest group of about one million persons – receive a median income of 20,292 euro, i.e. only 50% of the wages paid to men.

As far as contract staff is concerned, women's median income amounts to 25,768 euro, corresponding to 77% of the income of their male counterparts. The smallest income gap is recorded among civil servants. With a median annual gross income of 46,726 euro, women earn approximately 93% of the income of their male colleagues.

Excluding part-time and seasonal workers, the median income of women totalled 30,775 euro, that of men 38,056 euro.

Minister for Women's Affairs Gabriele Heinisch-Hosek described the latest data on the wage gap in Austria as "alarming"; there was a pressing need for measures of the federal government to promote income transparency. Heinisch-Hosek called *inter alia* for more full-time jobs in enterprises.

**EUROPE INTERNATIONAL****Serbian President Tadic meets with Federal President Fischer**

Serbian President Boris Tadic paid a short visit to Vienna on 15 December 2011. At a meeting with Federal President Heinz Fischer, Tadic expressed his “deep regret” that Austrian UN soldiers had been injured in armed conflicts at the border between Serbia and Kosovo. Serbia would do its utmost to prevent incidents of this kind in the future, stated Tadic.

According to a press release of the Office of the Austrian President, Tadic had reassured Fischer that he would stick to his pro-European democratic policy. The Serbian President was of the opinion that Serbia had satisfied the requirements of the European Commission to be granted candidate status and expressed Serbia’s disappointment that the decision had been postponed.

The press release also informed that Federal President Fischer had pointed out that Austria and a large majority of EU Member States believed that Croatia’s and Serbia’s EU membership would make an “essential contribution” to the stabilisation and democratisation of the Western Balkans. Fischer was optimistic that next March a decision would be taken in favour of granting Serbia the status of a candidate country.

**Foreign Minister Spindelegger holds talks with German Chancellor Merkel**

Vice Chancellor Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger met with German Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin on 12 December 2011. He stressed the feeling of unease of many EU Member States about the close German-French cooperation without adequate involvement of the other Member States. Moreover, the Berlin-Paris axis made it impossible to see Europe’s strength on the international stage, Spindelegger told Austrian media representatives. In fact, the world needed to hear the EU-27 speak with one voice.

Spindelegger urged that the UK should be convinced of adopting a less critical attitude towards the EU in the future. The Austrian Foreign Minister advocated that “new areas should be explored with a view to achieving again more things in common“. According to Spindelegger, a long-term discussion on a treaty change was not a one-way street to Brussels. The question which responsibilities could be re-transferred from the EU to the national governments, as requested by the UK,

was perfectly legitimate, but not in times of crisis.

**Minister of Defence Darabos pays visit to UN soldiers in Lebanon**

Minister of Defence Norbert Darabos is paying a pre-Christmas visit to the Austrian UN soldiers in Lebanon (UN camp in Naqoura) from 20 to 22 December 2011. In Beirut Darabos will also hold talks with Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati and Minister of Defence Fayeze Ghosn.

**Federal President Fischer in Qatar**

Federal President Heinz Fischer participated in a high-level Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations (UNAOC) in Doha (Persian Gulf emirate Qatar) on 11 December 2011. The next UNAOC Forum will take place in Vienna in February 2013.

Democratic developments and the respect of human rights were closely linked to freedom of speech, explained President Fischer in his opening statement to the Forum. Austria’s commitment was founded on its strong interest in human rights, pluralism and diversity management. “We concentrate on equal rights and opportunities for men and women as well as ideas and mechanisms of how to encourage the active involvement of young people“.

On 12 December 2011 Fischer opened Austria’s new embassy in Qatar. The building does not only accommodate Austria’s political representation but also an office of the Foreign Trade Department of the Federal Economic Chamber (WKO). Qatar has abundant gas and oil resources. Boasting a per-capita GDP of 88,200 US dollars (65,900 euro), Qatar is considered the richest country in the world.

**World Policy Conference in Vienna**

The World Policy Conference took place at Hofburg in Vienna from 8 to 11 December 2011. Leading representatives of the political and economic arenas as well as of the religious communities participated in the conference. Among the attendees were Austrian Federal President Heinz Fischer, Turkish President Abdullah Gül, Israel’s Minister of Defence Ehud Barak as well as the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I. In his opening remarks President Fischer argued in favour of financial market regulation.

**ECONOMY****Green Electricity Report proves: Austria is a key player in renewable energy**

On 12 December 2011 Minister of Economy and Energy Reinhold Mitterlehner presented the Green Electricity Report 2011, emphasising: “Green electricity has developed favourably and dynamically, and the new Eco-Electricity Act will provide further impetus”. “Expecting a total share of funded green energy of 17.7 per cent for 2015, we will even exceed our target of 15 per cent“, said Mitterlehner. Producing 68 per cent of its electric from renewable energies, Austria is the number one in an EU comparison. It is also among the countries boasting above-average shares of renewable energies in the total energy supply.

**Rudolf Hundstorfer: number of people at risk of poverty stable despite crisis**

About one million people have a per-capita household income below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, which was 1,031 euro monthly in Austria in 2010. This is one of the findings of the EU-SILC data that are gathered annually in all Member States of the European Union and therefore also describe the income and living situation in Austria. “Although the poverty threshold rose due to a general increase in income, the number of people at risk of poverty has remained stable. This is mainly due to the tax reform adopted in 2008, the wage agreements and employment policy measures.“ This stable trend also supported the overall economy. “Social transfers are spent mainly on consumption and help to stabilise the economy, especially in times of crisis, underlined Minister for Social Affairs Rudolf Hundstorfer. Austria has the second-highest at-risk-of-poverty threshold in the EU, behind Luxembourg.”

**Municipalities apply the debt brake**

The Austrian municipalities (excluding Vienna) have succeeded in improving their financial situation considerably in 2010. This fact was revealed in the Financial Report of the Municipalities for 2011, published on 16 December 2011. Compared to the previous year, the total expenses were cut by at least two per cent, while the total income dropped by only 0.4 per cent. The municipalities decreased above all investment expenditure, especially for road construction and hydraulic engineering. However, they also cut subsidies for the economy and funding of the cultural sector.

**S&P auditors on a fact-finding mission in Vienna**

The auditors of the US rating agency Standard & Poor’s (S&P) are holding numerous talks in Vienna to examine the creditworthiness of the Republic of Austria. Austria hopes that it will not lose its triple A (the best rating awarded by S&P) in the new S&P assessment of domestic bonds. A downgrade by rating agencies usually leads to higher interest payments on newly issued bonds.

**Continuing double-digit growth of foreign trade volume**

As the Austrian Statistical Office (Statistik Austria) calculated based on preliminary data, the volume of goods imports in the period January to September 2011 totalled 97.08 billion euro, exceeding the level of the same period of 2010 by 17.3%. Austrian goods exports also increased by 14.2% to 91.10 billion euro. The Austrian trade balance showed a deficit of 5.98 billion euro.

**Green light from Brussels: Austrian roads remain free from giganliners**

Austria will be able to decide independently whether to admit giganliners on its roads or not. In its plenary session in Strasbourg on 15 December 2011 the European Parliament voted against the EU-wide authorisation of the 25-meter long lorries weighing 60 tons known as “giganliners”. Minister of Transport Doris Bures had said “a clear no to giganliners” from the very beginning. Three studies confirm the adverse effects of the mega trucks on road safety, infrastructure expenditure and rail cargo transport.

**Austria does not believe in the crisis**

Economic analysts paint gloomy economic scenarios almost on a daily basis. Caution prevails in most company headquarters all over the world. But in Austria enterprises apparently refuse to believe in a new crisis. This is the result of a recent survey by the Austrian Society for Marketing (OGM). Only 14 per cent of the 315 large enterprises polled in Austria at the end of November expected a crisis in the next year. 42 per cent were, however, convinced that the economic situation would remain unchanged or even improve significantly. The rest was ambivalent about the future – be it wishful thinking or forced optimism. But after all, most Austrian enterprises have made sizeable profits and investments during the current year.

**CULTURE MEDIA SCIENCE****“Winter tales“ at Vienna’s Museum of Art History (KHM)**

In tune with the spirit of the season, a comprehensive special exhibition of Vienna’s Museum of Art History (Kunsthistorisches Museum/KHM) presents 180 “winter artworks” from the Middle Ages to the present. Some of the exhibits are loans from 30 museums, while one fourth comes from the KHM’s own collection. The spotlight is turned on Dutch painting. The KHM itself owns a leitmotif of winter painting, Brueghel’s “Hunters in the Snow”. The rural winter landscapes of the Dutch Golden Age – painted during Europe’s Little Ice Age – unfold before the onlookers. The museum-goers are fascinated by the snow-covered landscapes of serene beauty and scenes of winter festivities.

The show also presents paintings of the four seasons (the winter paintings are juxtaposed with works depicting the other seasons), allegories and some selected still life paintings such as Giuseppe Arcimboldo’s “Winter“. Besides the painted interpretations of the cold season, objects such as winter slides, china and tapestries may be admired at KHM until 8 January 2012. [www.khm.at/](http://www.khm.at/)

**“Melancholy and Provocation“ at Leopold Museum**

In its large-scale tenth anniversary exhibition, Leopold Museum presents its Schiele collection, along with Vienna Actionism as well as contemporary art, dance and theatre. The part of the exhibition curated by Elisabeth Leopold traces the first solo exhibition of Schiele at Kunstsalon Miethke in 1911 and investigates the relationship between Schiele’s oeuvre and the work of Kokoschka, Gothic art and Indonesian shadow puppets. The section compiled by Diethard Leopold juxtaposes Schiele with representatives of Vienna Actionism, such as Rudolf Schwarzkogler and Günter Brus, as well as contemporary artists. Leopold’s concept is based on the hypothesis that the topicality of an artist is not determined by the market or the audience but contemporary artists. The dancer and choreographer Philipp Gehmacher created “Grey Room with Egon Schiele“, combining self-portraits of Schiele with his own works. Theatre maker Claudia Bosse developed installations with foam materials and listening booths in the main hall of Leopold Museum. Visual arts take centre stage thanks to Franz Graf and Elke Krystufek. The exhibitions “The Excitement Continues“ and “Hermann Nitsch

– Structures“ complete the show running until 30 January 2012.

[www.leopoldmuseum.org](http://www.leopoldmuseum.org)

**“René Magritte“ at Albertina**

The retrospective (closing on 26 February 2012) curated by Gisela Fischer, Christoph Grunenberg and Darren Pih brings together 150 paintings and drawings as well as 117 posters, films, books, sculptures and other media of the world-famous Belgian surrealist René Magritte (1898-1967).

The exhibition created in cooperation with Tate Liverpool tries a balancing act between chronological order and a thematic focus to highlight new facets of Magritte – who considered himself a thinker, rather than a painter.

**Kunsthau Wien presents Henri Cartier-Bresson**

The photographer, drawer and film director Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908–2004) had already won renown as the embodiment of modern photography during his lifetime. He was influenced by the surrealists around André Breton and the philosophy of Zen Buddhism. He inspired generations of photographers with his specific aesthetics and his rich oeuvre before devoting himself to painting and drawing in his later years.

His book “The Decisive Moment” is one of the most frequently cited publications in the history of photography. As a member of the photography agency Magnum Photos (co-founded by him in 1947), he set new standards in first-rate photojournalism committed to social issues. The exhibition “Henri Cartier-Bresson. The Compass in the Eye: America-India-Soviet Union“ highlights critical phases in the history of these countries based on 214 photos and several documentary films. The show closing on 26 February 2012 was developed in cooperation with Magnum Photos and Fondation Henri-Cartier-Bresson.

[www.kunsthauwien.com/](http://www.kunsthauwien.com/)

**“No fashion, please!“ at Vienna Kunsthalle**

The show “No fashion, please!“ curated by Peter Weiermair comprises 15 solo presentations of young international fashion, *zeitgeist* and magazine photographers, incorporating sequences, photo-text collages and videos. Clothes become part of a narrative *mis-scène*, expressing ideals of changing body aesthetics as well as projections of a fantastic “wishful reality”. The works of artists such as Jeff Bark, Leigh Bowery, Izima Kaoru, Alex

Prager and Sophia Wallace are showcased until 22 January 2012. [www.kunsthallewien.at/](http://www.kunsthallewien.at/)

### **“Work in progress“ – exhibition at the Museum of Technology in Vienna**

The exhibition about work at the Vienna Museum of Technology is not only modern, refreshing and humorous but also enhances knowledge transfer. On 1,300 square metres it offers a section devoted to cultural history (to be displayed for four years) as well as an interactive, highly participatory exhibition space boasting state-of-the-art technology thanks to numerous sponsors. A highlight shown for the first time is the so-called “bionic trunk” (a bionic handling assistant inspired in an elephant’s trunk). The participatory exhibition – highly recommendable also for children – may be visited until 24 June 2012. “It is more difficult to explain work to children than a locomotive or all the technical gadgets of the world”, said Museum Director Gabriele Zuna-Kratky.

As several curators worked on the exhibition for two years, very different positions on work are represented in it. “Our goal was to highlight economic and social connections but also the mental and physical effects of work”, stated Scientific Coordinator Hubert Weitensfelder. As links between the past and present are established consistently, the visitors do not walk through model workshops but find themselves immersed in different work contexts that invite them to become active. Project Manager Bernadette Decristoforo considers informal learning, common experiences and exchanges with adults to be of crucial importance: “Children only distinguish between joy and pain but they do not know the work-leisure dichotomy of the adults”. The Museum of Technology developed an educational workbook as well as a quiz for preparing or following up visits to the exhibition.

[www.technischesmuseum.at/](http://www.technischesmuseum.at/)

### **“Weit.Way.Land“ at Off-Theater**

Bernhard Ensemble – directed by Grischka Voss and Ernst Kurt Weigel – presents a work drawing on Schnitzler’s marriage drama and psychological study “The Vast Domain“ as well as David Lynch’s film “Lost Highway“. Narrative strands and characters of these works were used as inspiration (the five members of Bernhard Ensemble play several characters), but completely new texts were written for this play performed at Off-Theater in Kirchengasse in Vienna (until 28 January 2012).

In the setting of a living room and a garden shed, heavy with obscure Lynch references, the

action on the stage shows what Schnitzler failed to say. The citizens of the fin de siècle are the globally acting bobos of today hiding their emotional problems behind political correctness. A mother and mystery character uncovers the painful unconscious life of the married couple. Factory-owner Forfeiter is undergoing a midlife crisis, gets lost in the turmoil of his dark soul and finds himself trapped in a mysterious parallel work of greed, lust, fraud, jealousy and disorientation, turning him into a murderer. [www.bernhard-ensemble.at](http://www.bernhard-ensemble.at)

### **“Resonanzen“ 2012 at Konzerthaus**

The 20<sup>th</sup> edition of the “Resonanzen“ festival of early music at Vienna’s Konzerthaus (from 14 to 22 January 2012) will present well-known celebrities and audience-favourites. Besides ten concerts, the festival offers a wide range of events under the motto “In Vienna”.

The festival will be opened with “L’oracolo in Messenia“ (conductor Fabio Biondi), Vivaldi’s last opera preserved only in fragments. On 15 January 2012 “Vorstadtballade“ will lure the audience to the “largest inn of the Holy Roman Empire“, as dramaturg Peter Reichelt put it. “Minnesang und Bauernschelte“ will be performed by Ensemble Unicorn (led by Michael Posch) on 17 January 2012. “Amusing Incidents“ are offered on 18 January 2012 by the Cappella della Pietà de’ Turchini, conducted by Antonio Florio, with funny intermezzi and ballet music by Nicola Matteis. The concert on 19 January 2012 will be “rhythmical, very complex and delicate“: Mala Punica conducted by Pedro Memelsdorff will perform works by Johannes Ciconia. “A Little Serenade“ – but without Mozart – will be presented by Italian soprano Roberta Invernizzi on 20 January 2012. The main festival programme also includes the ensemble “Schikaneders Jugend“, which had participated in the series devoted to young talents titled “Vorspiele“ (“Preludes”) two years ago.

Besides the traditional series “Preludes” and “Postludes” with promising talents as well as film screenings at “Resonanzen Lounge“, this year’s programme features again an exhibition on “Building Historical Instruments“; the musical instrument makers will “fill Konzerthaus with wonderful sounds for a weekend“, said project manager Julika Meixner.

A supporter from the early days of the festival, Spanish musician Jordi Savall, will conclude “Resonanzen“ with the ensemble “Le Concert des Nations” and a trip through “A Musical Europe”.

### **Presentation of new model of higher secondary education**

Based on a pilot project (since 2004, currently about 40 schools), a new model of higher secondary education (as from the 5<sup>th</sup> grade of secondary school) was developed. In accordance with the objectives of the government programme, each term the syllabus will focus on different subjects (“competence modules”). The new concept of higher secondary education offers various benefits, e.g.:

- a more concentrated and improved atmosphere for learning by dividing the syllabus into “competence modules”,
- better preparation for university education,
- improving the motivation of pupils,
- teaching tailored to the needs of pupils,
- a new culture of teaching and learning.

### **Claudia Schmied: teacher training “on a par” with universities**

Minister of Education Claudia Schmied plans to offer the first regular master degree programme at Pedagogical Universities already in the next academic year. To this end, the University Act will be amended. Master degree programmes are currently offered only as in-service training courses against payment of a fee; they are not accessible to the public.

### **SPÖ resumes discussion about university tuition fees**

Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann is willing to resume the discussions within the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) on university tuition fees and/or loan models for students although a majority in the SPÖ rejected tuition fees. Different models could be examined as long as they would not act as a barrier for students from financially disadvantaged families, stated the Chancellor after the meeting of the Council of Ministers on 13 December 2011. Recently SPÖ members had presented models that were worth considering provided that nobody would be prevented from studying.

### **Pupils are to teach “intercultural skills” to their peers**

The aim of the peers project “Intercultural Skills” conducted at Upper Austrian schools is to enhance motivation for integration and reduce prejudices – the target group are pupils of the same age. According to Secretary of State for Integration Sebastian Kurz, peers could often achieve more than social workers and school psychologists. At present 25 teens are trained as “peers”. Their task is to convey a message “that an attitude of openness to others

is cool“, explained Youth Councillor of Upper Austria Doris Hummer.

In parallel, the project would be evaluated scientifically, stated Hummer. Secretary of State Kurz announced that the project could be introduced also in other regions of Austria.

### **Austria and China cooperate in quantum physics**

The Austrian Academy of Sciences (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften/ÖAW) and its Chinese equivalent, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, entered into a cooperation agreement to conduct joint experiments in quantum physics in space and to develop the necessary technologies and infrastructure.

The Institute of Quantum Optics and Quantum Information of the ÖAW, whose Vienna branch was set up jointly with the University of Vienna, will cooperate in developing the necessary space and earth technologies. The invitation from China was “a tribute to research in Vienna”, the ÖAW was pleased to inform.

### **Natural pest control: success at Vienna University of Technology**

Domestic farmers consider the plant disease “fire blight” a dreaded enemy of fruit trees. Researchers of the Vienna University of Technology (TU) developed a natural agent against this plant disease – and also claim to have tested it successfully. Heidrun Halbwirth received the silver medal of the Korea International Women’s Invention Exposition (KIWIE) awarded for research work leading to concrete inventions. Various companies have expressed their interest in applying the research findings to develop a marketable product in the near future.

### **Vienna University of Economics among Europe’s 30 best business schools**

The Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration was placed 28<sup>th</sup> among the 75 best European universities of economics in the “European Business School Ranking 2011” recently published by the “Financial Times“.

We scored points thanks to the international experience of our students. These results benefitted above all the students and graduates. “Nowadays it is not only important what you studied but also at which university you studied“, explained the rector of the Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration Christoph Badelt.

**SPORTS****2011 Prize for “Integration Through Sport” to two highly innovative projects**

The 2011 Prize for “Integration Through Sport” was awarded by Minister of Sport Norbert Darabos and Secretary of State for Integration Sebastian Kurz at the House of Sports in early December. Tribute was paid to the 19 prize winners for highly sustainable and innovative projects promoting the integration of people with a migration background. This prize has been granted for the fourth time by the Austrian Integration Fund.

Minister of Sport Norbert Darabos: “Sport makes an important contribution to the integration of socially disadvantaged groups in our society. Austria has a longstanding tradition of making sports accessible to all, including the socially weakest groups. The Ministry of Sport funds numerous projects of sports organisations focusing on this issue. Today we wish to call those people before the curtain who support these meaningful initiatives and to express our thanks”.

The award ceremony was attended by successful athletes such as Liu Jia and Mirna Jukic. The European champions in table tennis and swimming acted as role models motivating young people to become active in sports.

“With 70 entries for the prize, we achieved another record for the fourth time in a row. The welcomed great interest expressed in this prize highlights the commitment of the Austrian sports associations to supporting integration”, said Alexander Janda, Managing Director of the Austrian Integration Fund.

A total of 19 project sponsors received awards in three categories. The two main prizes of the year 2011, each worth 3,000 euro, go to:

- “Mobile Sports Care” initiated by Rosa Sport & Wellness and the Vienna branch of the Working Community of Sports and Physical Education (ASKÖ); the organisers of the project approach women and mothers of Arab origin on children’s playgrounds to offer them tailored sports programmes;
- “Integration Cup Austria 2011” of the United Nations Alianza Latina; teams with a migrant share of at least 50 per cent compete in various disciplines, from volleyball to Hip Hop.
- 1,000 euro in prize money go to seven projects; 200 euro are granted in recognition of ten selected projects.

**Premiere of Winter Youth Olympic Games in Innsbruck**

On 13 January 2012 the first Winter Youth Olympic Games will be opened officially in Innsbruck. 1,059 athletes from 67 nations will compete on nine days in a total of 63 events for gold, silver and bronze medals. On 6 December 2011 the first three medals produced for this event were presented in the presence of Minister of Sport Norbert Darabos in the ceremonial hall of Münze Österreich AG. The gold, silver and bronze medals for the Games in Innsbruck are 70 millimetres in diameter, weigh 110 grams and are made of bronze; the medals for the first place are plated with gold, those for the second rank with silver.

“The go-ahead has been given for the final and decisive preparations“, stated Darabos. “With the premiere of the Winter Youth Olympic Games, we will once more take centre stage in the world of sport. And we wish to deliver perfect competitions and a unique atmosphere at this event for athletes aged between 15 and 18 years.” Karl Stoss, President of the Austrian Olympic Committee, emphasised: “The International Olympic Committee selected Innsbruck as the host of the Winter Youth Olympic Games because one can safely assume that everything will be organised smoothly. Not without good reason, as Innsbruck did not only organise Olympic Games twice but has also acted as a host of numerous other large-scale events in the past few years.“

**Initiative “Safe on Austrian Ski Slopes“**

The ski season is drawing near. Hundreds of thousands of people will be skiing and snowboarding on Austrian ski slopes also this winter. On 13 December 2011 the Ministry of the Interior launched the initiative “Safe on Austrian Ski Slopes”. The Austrian Ski Association, UNIQA (Austria’s largest insurance group) and the Austrian drivers’ association ÖAMTC will act as project partners. According to Minister of the Interior Johanna Mikl-Leitner, the aim is to encourage skiers and snowboarders “to familiarise themselves with the relevant rules for the ski slopes”. To make sure that this project will become a success, the website [www.sicher-auf-der-piste.at](http://www.sicher-auf-der-piste.at) does not only offer safety recommendations but also a contest for kids and teens aged between 10 and 18 years.