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**HOME AFFAIRS****Budget talks concluded**

The budget talks between Minister of Finance Maria Fekter and the ministries have been concluded. The coalition parties – Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) and People’s Party (ÖVP) – recently also reached a consensus on the controversial negotiation chapter “education”. Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann considered this a proof of good cooperation and the federal government’s ability to act.

“At today’s meeting of the Council of Ministers we were able to announce that the preparatory discussions on the fundamentals of a common budget 2012, which the Minister of Finance held with the ministries, have been concluded”, said Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann after the meeting of the Council of Ministers on 6 September 2011. “We are highly pleased about the fact that we reached an agreement on the education budget as education is one of the top priorities on the governments agenda“, said Faymann. The budget is not expected to bring major surprises. The limits defined in the financial framework in spring have not been exceeded, informed the Chancellor after the session of the Council of Ministers.

The Federal Chancellor underlined the matter-of-fact attitude of the coalition partners to government work, which was clearly illustrated by the budget agreement as well as the common position on European policy.

**90 years of Burgenland**

Federal President Heinz Fischer and Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann highlighted the solidarity and willingness to help of the population of Burgenland at the solemn session of the regional parliament (Landtag) marking the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Burgenland on 4 September 2011. Both of them referred to the historical origins of Burgenland.

Burgenland had repeatedly played a key role in European history during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and had also been “an important gate to freedom” for hundreds of thousands of people in 1989, reminded Faymann. It set an “outstanding example to other regions and to Europe” by showing that diversity in history, culture and language could be regarded as “an opportunity and a common strength”, rather than a threat, emphasised the Federal Chancellor.

But one also had to remind of the dark chapters of the history of Burgenland, e.g. the victims of Schattendorf, the NS crimes in Rechnitz and Lackenbach, the seven destroyed Jewish com-

munities or the cowardly attack against Roma in Oberwart, said Faymann. But Burgenland had always shown that “togetherness, love of democracy and the region” prevailed. It had been shaped by post-war reconstruction and developed into a competitive business location in the recent past, underlined Faymann.

**Trade union calls for wage negotiation round for women supported by Minister**

In Austria the income of women is 22% below that of men. In the preliminaries of the wage talks in autumn, the Trade Union of Private-Sector Employees (GPA-djp) therefore announced to introduce special wage negotiation rounds for women. The “time of appeals” was over, explained Wolfgang Katzian, Chairman of the largest sub-trade union “GPA-djp” to media representatives on 6 September 2011. Now the “gap between women’s and men’s income had to be closed”, said Katzian. From the perspective of the trade union, positive discrimination of women was permissible under the Constitution.

Minister for Women’s Affairs Gabriele Heinisch-Hosek supported the initiative: “This is an approach the social partners should look into in more detail. We must welcome everything that helps to combat the wage gap and to overcome women’s discrimination“, stated Heinisch-Hosek. Negotiations with the economic sector should be started “urgently“. She herself would hold talks with the coalition partner, said the Minister.

**Heinisch-Hosek: “Gender mainstreaming prevents inequality“**

The federal government presented five priorities regarding the implementation of gender mainstreaming to the Council of Ministers on 6 September 2011. “Gender Mainstreaming is a tool to avoid inequality. And this is something everybody will benefit from“, stated Minister for Women’s Affairs Gabriele Heinisch-Hosek.

In concrete terms, before adopting laws and regulations it was necessary to examine their effects on the life situations of women and men to prevent inequality.

The five priorities are as follows: reinforcing gender mainstreaming at the executive level in administration; gender-specific data gathering in reports, studies and publications of the ministries; enshrining gender mainstreaming in legislation; taking into account gender aspects in funding and contract awarding; better training and information of public sector employees.

**EUROPE INTERNATIONAL****Federal President Fischer pays state visit to Finland**

Federal President Heinz Fischer paid a state visit to Finland from 8 to 9 September 2011. Members of the Austrian delegation included Salzburg's Governor Gabriele Burgstaller and Secretary of State Wolfgang Waldner. Items on the agenda were talks with Finnish President Tarja Halonen, Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen and Speaker of Parliament Eero Heinäluoma.

In a press conference Halonen and Finnish Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja stressed Finland's present efforts to achieve an amicable solution regarding the planned bailout deal for Greece and the repayment guarantee demanded by Helsinki. Finland had always made its position clear and considered this a contribution to the discussion, stated Halonen.

Fischer welcomed Finland's commitment to an agreement on aid for Greece, underlining that all issues relating to the euro had to be treated on the basis of solidarity and consensus.

Other subjects for debate were the intensification of bilateral cooperation in economic and cultural matters as well as international issues. Austria supports Finland's application for a seat on the UN Security Council for the period 2013/2014. Both sides emphasised the good Schengen collaboration among the EU Member States.

Fischer concluded his state visit with a trip to the European Capital of Culture Turku.

**Minister of Defence Darabos pays working visit to Berlin**

Minister of Defence Norbert Darabos paid an official visit to his German counterpart Thomas de Maizière in Berlin on 7 September 2011. Their talks focused on the reform of the German federal army, the European security and defence policy (EU Battle Group), international missions as well as efforts to intensify bilateral cooperation.

In Berlin Darabos informed himself about the latest developments regarding the reform of the German army and the experience made in the transition to a volunteer army. He did not have the impression that Germany faced problems in recruiting volunteers for the armed forces, stated Darabos. In this context, he highlighted the professional presentation of the German army in the public (busses, portable information stands) – a strategy that, in many respects, could serve as an example to Austria.

The Austrian Minister of Defence reiterated that the first pilot tests to abolish compulsory military service would be launched in 2012. Darabos instructed the Army High Command to initiate projects promoting the transition to a professional army. These projects include the introduction of a new bonus system for the militia and measures to reduce the number of "system support staff" (i.e. non-soldiers).

**Foreign Minister Spindelegger received by Pope Benedict XVI.**

Pope Benedict XVI. received Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger and his wife Margit for talks in Vatican on 7 September 2011. The meeting was held after the General Audience at St. Peter's Square in Rome. Issues regarding religious freedom and the dialogue on human rights between the EU and the religious communities were discussed. Spindelegger informed the Pope inter alia that Austria advocated a firmer commitment of the EU to the protection of persecuted Christians and religious minorities.

**Austria de-freezes Libyan funds amounting to 150 million euro**

Austria de-freezes Libyan funds amounting to 150 million euro. They will be used for financing humanitarian projects and buying fuel, explained the representative of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber in Libya, David Bachmann, to the Austrian Press Agency (APA) on 8 September 2011. Austria had frozen Libyan funds totalling 1.2 billion euro.

Bachmann expressed his hope that domestic companies would propose projects, e.g. mobile hospitals or water treatment plants. To ensure that the funds would be used for the earmarked purpose, the Libyan Central Bank had to file an application with the Austrian National Bank, stated Bachmann.

**Austria - Hungary: five-point programme against migrant smugglers**

Besides a common border mission, Austria and Hungary called for increased surveillance and checks of the border hinterland on transit routes to Austria, daily information exchanges as well as a new special investigation team. Implementation of this programme against migrant smugglers would start in mid-September, Minister of the Interior Johanna Mikl-Leitner told the Austrian Press Agency (APA) on 6 September 2011.

## ECONOMY

### **Mitterlehner: excellent export performance of Austrian companies**

According to Minister for Economic Affairs Reinhold Mitterlehner, the export data published on 6 September 2011 highlight the strong performance of domestic enterprises and the effectiveness of the internationalisation campaign. "During the first six months of the year, our companies did well in an increasingly difficult global market, achieving outstanding export results. In this way they strengthen economic development and safeguard jobs in Austria", emphasised Mitterlehner with regard to the increase in exports by 17.2% to 60.5 billion euro in the first half of 2011. While rising only by 1.9% from the previous month, exports reached a high level in June – as last year an increase by 22.2% (from June 2009) had been reported.

Mitterlehner still considers a new export record possible for the whole year 2011 – even though dynamism is dwindling. "In view of gloomier international economic forecasts, we now have to remain on the growth path as long as possible and to strengthen the successfully initiated structural change", said Mitterlehner. The internationalisation campaign of the Ministry of Economy and the Federal Austrian Economic Chamber (WKÖ) offered tailored support, notably to small and mid-sized enterprises. The trend towards third markets outside the EU reinforced by this programme was continuing. Exports to this region saw an above-average increase in the first half of 2011, i.e. by 21.6%. This upward trend proved that Austria's enterprises had the right products and services for these important markets. The enormous potential of these markets should be realised to a greater extent, said Minister Mitterlehner. In view of the current situation in the global markets, stronger diversification was more important than ever.

By making available 35 million euro to the Export Department of the Economic Chamber (AWO/WKÖ) for its "going international" campaign, the Ministry of Economy supports enterprises planning to open up new markets.

### **Tourist experts satisfied about current summer season**

The domestic tourist enterprises had done fairly well in the current summer season and were satisfied with the results, said the Chairman of the Federal Department for the Tourist and Leisure Industry of the Austrian Economic Chamber (WKÖ), Hans Schenner, in an inter-

view with the Austrian Press Agency (APA) on 6 September 2011. Thanks to fair weather conditions, the month of August would make up for the rainy July, the result would be "acceptable" for all by the end of the season, Schenner stated optimistically.

The summer season lasts from May to October, the main share of the income is earned in the months July and August.

Spain, Greece and Turkey were the most popular destinations of Austrians spending their holidays abroad.

In Austria city tourism reported particularly strong increases until mid-season (end of July). But according to Schenner, holiday accommodation providers may also look back on good results in August. Based on preliminary figures of the Austrian Statistical Office (Statistik Austria), guest nights in domestic accommodation establishments increased by 1.7% to 30.36 million nights at the end of July from the prior-year period. The number of holiday-makers climbed by 4.3% to 9.19 million tourists during the same period.

### **Debate on "debt brake"**

The "debt brake" recently promoted by Minister of Finance Maria Fekter and Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger (both members of the Austrian People's Party) is not flatly rejected by the coalition partner (Social Democratic Party). Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann was ready to discuss the possibility of enshrining the "debt brake" in the law. Details of this mechanism were decisive. It would for example have to be possible to act/invest anti-cyclically in times of crisis – as the government had done successfully with the economic stimulus packages and short-time working arrangements in the recent past, stated Faymann at the closed-door meeting of the SPÖ Party Executive Committee in Kahlenberg near Vienna on 8 September 2011.

It was crucial to decrease debt, while maintaining a high employment level and reducing the tax burden on labour, stressed Faymann.

### **Excessive consumption of natural resources**

The Austrians should use natural resources more sparingly. Based on a study of the Ministry of Environment, 66 kg of natural resources are consumed per capita and per day. Natural resources had to be used more efficiently to make Austria more independent from imports, demanded Minister of the Environment Nikolaus Berlakovich and Minister of Economy Reinhold Mitterlehner.

**CULTURE MEDIA SCIENCE****Klangspuren Festival of Contemporary Music 2011**

This outstanding festival will be held for the 18<sup>th</sup> time in Schwaz, Tyrol (closing on 24 September 2011). It brings together established and upcoming talents of the new music scene. In 2011 the focus is on contemporary music from Spain, a portrait of George Benjamin (2011 composer in residence of the International Ensemble Modern Academy), a new joint project with the Museum of Art History in Vienna (KHM) as well as on the “e\_may” festival celebrating female creativity. Participants from Spain include “Trio Arbós”, “Ensemble Residencias”, renowned personalities such as Mauricio Sotelo and young composers. The creative links between Vienna and Tyrol are best illustrated by two formations of the ensemble Klangforum Wien and the world premiere of the 5-part Tintoretto series by Wolfram Schurian (performed in cooperation with KHM and the famed Phace ensemble). E\_may was founded by Gina Mattiello and Pia Palme in 2007 to showcase the quality and diversity of women composers in the music scene. Their works will be performed by Palme and guest musicians on 23 September 2011.

**Reopening of Vienna’s Museum for Modern Art (mumok)**

The reopening of the Museum for Modern Art (mumok) – revamped by architects Ortner & Ortner – on 8 September 2011 has been one of the recent highlights in Vienna’s art scene. After having been appointed as museum director in October 2010, Karola Kraus presented the first exhibition developed by her. The show “Museum of Desires” (co-curated by Rainer Fuchs) sends out a message for the future of mumok. Above the entrance area (remaining on a lower level of the building), the “Hill mumok” café has been opened, offering views of a Cindy Sherman photo mural. In the mumok hall museum-goers may admire Otto Zitko’s new ceiling painting. The so-called “factory” was converted into a spacious cinema designed as a black box space with an adjustable screen and an adjoining lounge. This room may be used for different events. After remodelling the building, mumok also received a new corporate design (by Florian Pumhösl and Martha Stutteregger).

The current show presents an accomplished and unprecedented juxtaposition of exhibits selected from the mumok’s collection (comprising 9000 works), including 37 works the

museum would like to acquire as well as pieces of art rarely displayed in the past few years. These 37 items on the wish list – for which the modest public budget for acquisitions is insufficient – are to be bought with the aid of sponsors (9 wishes have already come true thanks to the Ludwig Foundation and a fundraising dinner.) The show is chronologically structured and boasts a lavish space design. It deliberately excluded very popular works of the museum to propose innovative approaches that focus on dialogue and open up new vistas.

**Christian Strasser appointed as new Head of Museumsquartier (MQ)**

The ex-manager of the Linz-based event centre “Posthof” will succeed to Wolfgang Waldner on 1 October 2011. Strasser explained that his main goal was to enhance the positioning of Museumsquartier as a “space for creating art”.

**Tobias Natter is new museological programme director of Leopold Museum**

The experienced art historian and specialist in the art of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century was previously active for Vorarlberger Landesmuseum, where he developed a new museum concept.

**Theatres in Graz 2011/2012**

The steering committee of the theatre holding company “Theaterholding Graz-Steiermark” extended the term of the financing agreement to 2017 (originally ending in 2014). Hence, the viability of the Graz-based theatres has been secured for the near future. This decision also takes account of the outstanding development and artistic accomplishments of the theatres of Graz. As the awards granted to Schauspielhaus prove, these efforts have been recognised beyond Styria’s borders. Managers Anna Badora (Schauspielhaus), Elisabeth Sobotka (Opera House) and Michael Schilhan (Next Liberty) were offered contract renewals.

The season 2011/2012 of the **Graz Opera** opens with the world premiere of the dance piece “Upper Room” (a new choreography by ballet director Darrel Toulon) on 17 September 2011. As the opera programme features Giuseppe Verdi’s “Othello”, the opening concert is also inspired in the Italian repertoire. It will be performed by the Graz Philharmonic Orchestra and conducted by Johannes Fritsch (Verdi, Respighi, Rossini, Nino Rota) on 18 September 2011. “Pique Dame” by Tchaikovsky (music director: Tecwyn Evans, production: Peter Konwitschny) – a coproduction with Leipzig Opera – will be staged as from 6 November 2011. Opera lovers may

enjoy “Elektra” by Richard Strauss (music director: Johannes Fritzsch production: Johannes Erath) as from 21 January 2012; “Maria Stuarda” by Gaetano Donizetti (music director: Gaetano d’Espinosa, production, stage, costume and light design: Stefano Poda) will follow on 30 March 2012.

**Dance:** “Deal.West.East”, the second studio production of the Graz Opera’s dance company could go down in dance history. It has been created by prize-winning young choreographer Dong Jie from China and James Wilton, winner of the “Global Dance Contest” in London, (as from 22 March 2012). “Dido and Aeneas / DnA” (music director: Johannes Fritzsch, production and choreography: Darrel Toulon) is a seven-act dance theatre piece by Christian Jost. The content and music of the commissioned work draws on Purcell’s Baroque opera of 1689. It will be performed as from 24 May 2012. With this world premiere, the dance company of Graz Opera concludes its three-part Baroque series – after “Nomads” (music by Bach) and “Messiah” (music by Händel).

Graz Opera will present a revival of the **musical** “Singin’ in the Rain”. The programme also includes “Gigi” by Alan Jay Lerner & Frederick Loewe. A new production of the **opereetta** “A Waltz Dream” by Oscar Straus (directed by Michael Schilhan and conducted by Marius Burkert) will be staged as from 7 December 2011. Being quite faithful to the original version of the world premiere, it will do justice to the great composer Oscar Straus.

The repertoire for the **young audience** includes the children’s opera “Das kleine Gespenst” by Walther Soyka, a production of Wiener Taschenoper in cooperation with Graz Opera (as from 20 November 2011), “Das ist doch der Gipfel!” following the footsteps of Ernst Krenek, starring actress Julia Stemberger (as from 25 January 2012) as well as the fairy opera “The Arabian Princess” by Juan Crisóstomo de Arriaga.

**Concerts:** A piano concert with Daniel Barenboim is given on 21 October 2011. The new concert series “Classical Music on Sunday” (starting on 13 November 2011) enhances the repertoire of Graz Opera.

**Drama:** Programme highlights include “Punk Rock” by Simon Stephens (production: Stefan Behrendt, in cooperation with the Drama Department of Graz Art University, premiere: 25 September 2011), “Der goldene Drache” by Roland Schimmelpfennig (production: Sarantos Zervoulakos, premiere: 29 September 2011) and “Biedermann und die Brandstifter” by Max Frisch (production: Bernadette Son-

nenbichler, premiere: 12 November 2011). Director Boris Nikitin develops his second project. “Bartleby oder Sicherheit ist ein Gefühl” (working title) explores “freedom and security” and will receive its world premiere on 2 May 2012.

The Graz-based **Next Liberty Youth Theatre** opens the season on 15 September 2011 with Astrid Lindgren’s “Ronja Räubertochter” (production: Michael Schilhan). The musical “Jim Knopf und die Wilde 13” by Konstantin Wecker based on a work of Michael Ende as well as Janosch’s “Oh wie schön ist Panama” will be put on stage in November. “The Robbers” by Schiller, “Frühstück mit Wolf” by Gertrud Pigor and “The Hunchback of Notre Dame” by George Isherwood – an Austrian premiere (produced by Helge Stradner) – will follow in spring 2012. [www.theater-graz.com](http://www.theater-graz.com)

### **Kunsthau Graz presents Ai Weiwei**

The photo and video exhibition (developed by the Winterthur Photo Museum) turns the spotlight on the artist Ai Weiwei, who acts as a communicator and warning voice. He started to create his photographic work during his 10-year stay in New York. After returning to Beijing, he began to document – and discuss on the Internet – urban planning and social realities in China. The exhibition running from 18 September 2011 to 8 January 2012 showcases the documenta project “Fairytale” as well as blog and mobile phone photos. This first large-scale exhibition and book project encompassing Weiwei’s photo and video works highlights the diversity, multifacetedness and networks of the socio-critical concept artist.

### **“Das andere Heimatmuseum”**

The museum, a universal artwork, was established by Viennese artist Aramis (Hans Peter Sagmüller) at the Palace of Lind near Neumarkt in Styria in 1996. Besides presenting a solo show of the artist who died in 2010, “Das andere Heimatmuseum” (“a different museum on local history”) is devoted to local art. It explores contemporary history and forgotten aspects of the Austrian identity through associative art installations. The museum also accommodates a memorial of the Mauthausen subcamp, where 20 political prisoners (mainly from Spain and Poland) and 50 Russians were detained from 1942 to 1945. Aramis’ lifetime project is continued by Carinthian director, author and theatre-maker Andreas Staudinger and Aramis’ widow Britta Sievers. The museum is open until 31 October 2011.

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

### **Head of rectors wanted: a president for 21 universities**

Hans Sünkel will not stand for re-election as rector of the Technical University of Graz. Thus the seat of the President of the Conference of Austrian Universities (Österreichische Universitätenkonferenz) becomes vacant. The prestigious position will be filled in autumn. The rectors have not yet decided for a candidate. The three favourites: Head of the Salzburg University Heinrich Schmidinger, Rector of the University of Applied Arts Gerald Bast and Wolfgang Schütz (Medical University of Vienna).

### **University Conference in autumn**

In autumn a new institution – the “University Conference” – will become responsible for coordinating the study programmes of universities and universities of applied sciences (Fachhochschulen) in Austria.

The draft university plan is expected to be completed by the end of 2011. The goal of Minister Töchterle: 30 per cent of all students should attend universities of applied sciences.

### **Top ranking for faculties of economics**

Austrian universities took a great leap forward in the ranking of the best faculties of economics in the German-speaking countries published by the German daily “Handelsblatt”. Of the four domestic universities ranking among the top 20, Vienna University (placed seventh) is the best address for fledgling economists in Austria. The ranking measures the research performance in economics and statistics.

### **WIFO study confirms success of Austrian research campaign**

Enterprises investing in research and development coped well with the economic crisis. In fact, today they are in a better position than before the crisis. As the latest study of the economic research institute WIFO shows, even export ratios are climbing. “This study confirms our path”, said Minister of Innovation Doris Bures. “During the crisis we filled the gap left by enterprises by making substantial investments in research and development.”

### **Phasing out traditional secondary school in 2015**

In agreement with the coalition partner (Austrian People’s Party), Minister of Education Claudia Schmied plans to make the “New Comprehensive School” the standard secondary school in Austria by the academic year 2015/2016. Based on a study, parents and pu-

pils are highly satisfied with this new type of school. The academic secondary school (“Gymnasium”) will continue to exist.

### **Generous support to pupils from the federal government and the Länder**

To ensure that Austria’s families can make ends meet after the summer holidays, they will receive support from the federal government and the Länder at the beginning of the new school year. Compulsory parent co-payments for textbooks were already abolished last year. Dictionaries and atlases are (again) distributed free of charge. A 13<sup>th</sup> month family allowance will be granted for children aged between 5 and 15. At the start of the school year, families in most Länder receive financial aid (most of them have to qualify through a means test).

### **ORF 3 and ORF Sport Plus start broadcasting on 26 October 2011**

On 26 October 2011, precisely on the Austrian National Day, the two new special-interest channels of the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF) ORF 3 and ORF Sport Plus will start broadcasting, announced ORF Director-General Alexander Wrabetz after reaching an agreement with the Austrian Competition Authority. The key themes covered by ORF 3: (popular) culture, religion and regional affairs on the one hand and Austrian contemporary history and topical events on the other hand.

### **ORF expands its successful TV library**

The Austrian Broadcasting Corporation has expanded the range of “ORF TV Library” from 70 to 110 programmes since summer. Besides news programmes (e.g. ZiB), documentaries, TV soaps, children’s programmes, thrillers, economic reports and regional programmes are made available online during seven days. The ORF’s media library is used by about 500,000 Austrians per month, with live streaming being the most popular service. According to Online Director Thomas Prantner, a radio library is likely to be started in 2012.

### **Viennese specialists launch lung study**

In autumn specialists in COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease) of the Ludwig-Boltzmann Institute and in pneumological epidemiology of Otto Wagner Hospital in Vienna will launch the first long-term lung study. More than 10,000 Austrians will undergo regular check-ups in a 12-year period. The research community expects to gather the much-needed representative data. Lung health is known to have an impact on the entire organism.

**SPORTS****UEFA President Platini pays official visit to Austria**

During his stay in Austria, UEFA President Michel Platini visited the new National Centre for Women's Football in St. Pölten. Platini was enthusiastic about the school and the new stadium built in close vicinity to the Centre.

Minister of Sport Darabos and UEFA President Platini took advantage of the opportunity to exchange ideas about burning issues such as betting fraud and violence in stadiums – problems UEFA is also increasingly faced with. Platini and Darabos agreed that it was necessary to intensify cooperation on these issues between the European sports associations and the European Union in the next years.

The National Centre for Women's Football is part of the programme of the Austrian Football Association (ÖFB) to promote young talents. Its aim is to support female kickers during transition from junior to professional football. It provides intensive training allowing the women footballers to achieve a high level of technical and tactical abilities. Great importance is also attached to the personal development of the young women players. The Football Academy offers tertiary-level studies of sports science, sports medicine and psychology.

In December 2010 the UEFA Executive Committee passed a resolution to promote women's football and to support each of the 53 UEFA member associations with an annual subsidy of 100,000 euro between 2012 and 2016 with a view to further developing women's football.

**Countdown to the European Championship: volleyball "ambassadors" meet in imperial ambiance**

One week before the beginning of the European Volleyball Championships, Minister of Sport Norbert Darabos and President of the Austrian Volleyball Association (ÖVV) Peter Kleinmann invited to the large-scale "Euro-Volley kick-off event" – co-hosted by the insurance company UNIQA. Numerous ambassadors of the participating countries as well as the "European Championships ambassadors" attended the festive event at Gloriette in the Gardens of Schönbrunn Palace.

**Ski athletes protest against changes planned by International Ski Federation**

The heated discussion on safety issues continues even after the radical new rules for giant slalom – which practically meant the end of

carving skis – have been relaxed. Austrian ski athletes criticise above all that their opinion was ignored by FIS. They propose other solutions to improve safety that are more practicable and more likely to enhance the attractiveness of this sport, e.g. setting narrower courses, uniform slope preparation or changes of the ski racing suits. Almost 190 ski athletes declared their solidarity with these demands on a website specifically set up for this purpose.

**Hermann Maier wears ski racing suit also at "Madame Tussauds"**

The famous former ski racer nicknamed "Hermannator" now has a double. The Vienna-based branch of "Madame Tussauds" will exhibit a wax figure of Hermann Maier as from 9 September 2011. For creating the wax double of Maier an artists team from London travelled to Vienna in September 2010. During a three-hour sitting about 500 measurements of the head and body of the athlete were taken.

**National Park Lake Neusiedel: "Mysterious underwater world"**

With the exhibition "Submerge yourself! The mysterious underwater world of the National Park", the National Park Lake Neusiedel wishes to introduce its visitors to the aquatic fauna of the nature reserve. The exhibition funded with EU support is staged at the Information Centre in Illmitz (Burgenland) as well as at the Hungarian National Park Centre in Fertőuljak. Bilingual exhibition brochures are available. Admission is free.

Besides presenting highlights of the flora and fauna, the exhibition aims at demonstrating interrelations and motivating the visitors to devote more time to experiencing nature.

<http://www.naturerlebnistage.at/>

**A route through the varied landscape of Waldviertel**

It is impossible to answer the question what is typical of the region "Waldviertel" in Lower Austria. But there are ways to savour the beauty of this wonderful landscape, for example on the so-called "panorama route" starting out in Bad Traunstein. In fact this route does not offer panoramic views but an interesting and varied nature experience. Romantic woodland and dark rock formations are followed by open space, colourful meadows and fields.

<http://www.waldviertel.at>