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HOME AFFAIRS

Federal government agreed on “transparency package”

At its meeting behind closed doors on Kahlenberg near Vienna on 27 April 2012, the federal government agreed on a “transparency package” with strict rules on disclosure for political parties and politicians. It provides for an obligation to disclose party donations exceeding 5,000 euro (and the name of the donor), a ban on donations to enterprises with government ties and chambers, a cap on election campaign spending of 7 million euro, tighter criminal law provisions on corruption, a lobbyists law and the obligation of politicians to disclose secondary activities. Discussions on how to involve the Länder in these new legal measures are still underway. According to Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann, the key elements of the “transparency package” agreed on between the coalition parties will be laid down in draft legislation, which is likely to be adopted by the Council of Ministers on 15 May 2012. In the following talks will be held with the opposition to ensure the two-thirds majority required in the National Council to pass the “transparency package”. The two-thirds majority is for example indispensable to control the party coffers – which will become the responsibility of the Court of Auditors. Parliament will vote on the package before the summer break.

Faymann emphasised vis-à-vis reporters that the new set of measures on political transparency would show the population that Austria was fit for becoming “a model in Europe”.

Priority measures on education, science, long-term care and labour market

At its closed-door meeting on Kahlenberg near Vienna (27 April 2012), the federal government also drew attention to priority measures which will help to boost economic growth and employment, some of which have already been launched. A total of 4 billion euro has been made available for education, science, long-term care services, the labour market and thermal rehabilitation programmes for the period until 2016.

Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann emphasised that the government had not only adopted an austerity package but also launched initiatives in vital areas. The Long-Term Care Funding Scheme was prolonged until 2016 (additional amount: 650 million euro). 750 million euro were made available for safeguarding jobs, especially those of older workers. 1.6 billion euro would be allocated to schools

and about 1 billion euro to the tertiary sector of education. The thermal rehabilitation of buildings would continue to be funded with 100 million euro annually.

Precisely in times of austerity, one should not stop investing for the future, stated Faymann. It was important that Austria maintained its high employment level which has become the envy of Europe.

A monitoring group will be set up to ensure the consistent implementation of these measures. “We will keep our promises – this is another way to strengthen the trust of the population in the reliability of the government”, underlined the Federal Chancellor.

One year after the labour market opening: 27,000 Eastern Europeans

The Austrian labour market has been open to Eastern Europeans since 1 May 2011. However, the mass influx – feared by many Austrians – has not occurred. In the first eleven months (data for April are not yet available) almost 27,000 workers from the Eastern European EU Member States migrated to Austria, informed the Ministry of Social Affairs on 30 April 2012.

Most Eastern European workers came from the two neighbouring countries Hungary and Slovakia as well as from Poland. Romanians and Bulgarians will benefit from unrestricted entry to Austria as from 2014. Jobs in the construction sector and tourism are in great demand. The majority of jobseekers moved to Vienna and Lower Austria.

Progress Report on Women’s Quota

About one year ago, the federal government introduced a women’s quota for the supervisory boards of enterprises close to the state. On 24 April 2012 Minister for Women’s Affairs Gabriele Heinisch-Hosek and Economic Minister Reinhold Mitterlehner presented the first progress report. Half of the companies with government ties are already complying with the 25-per-cent women’s quota (deadline: end of 2013). As the data proved, the federal government had been quite ambitious. “I am proud of it”, stated Heinisch-Hosek.

While according to the report of the Court of Auditors of 2007/2008, only 16.1% of all supervisory board members in the public economy were women, the percentage has now increased to 26% in the 55 enterprises of the federal government. “In this way we improve women’s career opportunities but also strengthen the companies and Austria’s position as a business location”, said Mitterlehner.

EUROPE INTERNATIONAL**Chancellor Faymann: Hollande's victory is a "great opportunity"**

Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann congratulated François Hollande on his victory in the presidential elections in France (6 May 2012), which he described as an "impressive success". For the European Union this meant a "great opportunity". Instead of deciding only on austerity policies, the EU could now also draw conclusions from the economic crisis, said Faymann in the news programme "Morgenjournal" (Austrian radio channel Ö1).

Faymann hopes for fresh impetus to the idea of a financial transactions tax as the additional income could be used to finance educational systems and the combat against youth unemployment. More growth and employment in Europe were key parameters for stability and social peace, said Faymann. But even Hollande would not be able to end austerity. Moreover, additional sources of income were required. The Federal Chancellor mentioned that Austria could serve as an example as new taxes on assets were expected to generate an additional income of 500 to 600 million euro in the first year and up to 3 billion euro in the following years.

Parliament: against violence and racism – commemorating the NS victims

This year's remembrance event against violence and racism of the Austrian Parliament held on 4 May 2012 was dedicated to the victims of NS euthanasia. In her speech Speaker of Parliament Barbara Prammer appealed to make people with disabilities a naturally respected part of society. Integration alone was not enough. She also warned against measuring performance exclusively in absolute figures. There were many ways to benefit our society. "The accomplishments of people should never determine the value of their lives", said Prammer.

Besides the members of the federal government led by Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann, the event held in the historic meeting hall of Parliament was attended by Federal President Heinz Fischer, representatives of the religious communities as well as the members of Parliament of all political parties.

The reality of the daily lives of people with disabilities was still far from real equality, explained Prammer. The people affected did not yet benefit from equal access to education. In many cases they were faced with inadequate housing conditions, were frequently unem-

ployed and had lower incomes. The at-risk-of-poverty rate of people with disabilities was almost twice as high as that of people without disabilities, stated Prammer, who placed "great hopes" on the National Action Plan for People with Disabilities.

Brigitte Bailer, research head of the Documentary Archive of the Austrian Resistance Movement, reminded of the "eugenic selection" and systematic killing of people with disabilities during the NS regime. She mentioned the crimes in the euthanasia centres "Am Steinhof" (Vienna) and Hartheim Palace (Upper Austria) as shocking examples.

Federal President Fischer visits Austrian UN soldiers in Lebanon

During his several-day trip to Lebanon, Federal President Heinz Fischer also paid a visit to the Austrian soldiers of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in the south of the country on 27 April 2012. At a national reception in the Austrian section of the camp President Fischer thanked the soldiers for their "peace-keeping and humanitarian services" in the framework of the mission of the United Nations. They were rendered "in the spirit of Austria's fundamental principles: peace, stability and democracy", emphasised Federal President Heinz Fischer.

Foreign Minister Spindelegger pays official visit to Sarajevo

On 3 May 2012 Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger urged Bosnia and Herzegovina to press ahead with measures that would allow the country to come closer to the EU. During his visit to the capital Sarajevo, Spindelegger also stressed that he considered Bosnia's plans to apply for EU candidate status by the end of June "not realistic". According to the Foreign Minister, the next most important step was to adopt the budget for 2012 in May as well as to implement the decision of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) of December 2010 requiring Bosnia and Herzegovina to eliminate discrimination against minority groups in the State Presidency.

Austria "fully" supported the developments of the past months in Bosnia and Herzegovina. But efforts "should not be relaxed", Bosnia had to "speak with its own voice", underlined Spindelegger. According to him, an application for EU candidate status by the end of the year was realistic.

ECONOMY

Upward revision of growth forecast

At a meeting with his German counterpart Philipp Rösler on 25 April 2012, Economic Minister Reinhold Mitterlehner expressed his firm belief that the Austrian economy would surpass the forecasts of the experts. Instead of the predicted growth of between 0.4 and 0.8 per cent, “the growth rate will be around one percent”. Austrian enterprises stood quite a good chance of performing well in the current year. The sentiment of Austrian companies was more optimistic than that of the European average and there was no sign of a credit crunch. In fact, the companies had prepared themselves well as they had stepped up investment by 5.7 per cent last year. The so-called “gross fixed capital formation” climbed to 20.2 per cent of Austria’s GDP. This was the best value in the entire EU. Investment support had been provided by Austria Wirtschaftsservice, the development bank of the Federal Republic of Austria. In the current year it will grant subsidies totalling one billion euro.

Austrian labour market affected by weak economic performance in the EU

“Unfortunately, the Austrian labour market does not remain unaffected by the weak economic development in Europe“, Minister of Social Affairs Rudolf Hundstorfer commented on the labour market data for the month of April: “When Austria’s second most important trade partner Italy – but also Hungary, Great Britain, Spain and a number of other countries – shrink, this has adverse effects on the labour market of our export-oriented country.” Although Austria had achieved an all-time high in the number of employed persons, the increase in unemployment by 6.6 per cent in April could not be prevented. But even with an unemployment rate of 4.0 per cent, Austria was once more the EU Member State with the lowest level of joblessness. “Against the background of an increasingly difficult labour market situation, we have to keep on providing economic stimulus”, stated the Minister, who also highlighted the federal government’s recent employment campaign for long-term jobless persons.

Austrian tourism on a success path

“The holiday destination Austria is more popular than ever. Despite the globally difficult economic situation and stiffening competition with other tourist destinations, we attracted an

all-time high of guests in the winter season”, stressed Minister for Economy and Tourism Reinhold Mitterlehner. He was also pleased about the 2012 Action Plan for Tourism signed between the Federal Republic and the Länder at the 2nd conference on tourism in Schladming on 26 April 2012. This year’s priorities are innovation, product development, mobility and employment. The Action Plan also provides for the establishment of the Austrian Tourism Innovation Prize. It is granted in recognition of innovative, bookable products and programmes of the Austrian tourist and leisure sector. In the framework of this year’s Action Plan for Tourism, the Federal Republic and the Länder also agreed to actively support the project “Nation Branding Austria” commissioned by the federal government and coordinated by Mitterlehner. “Tourism plays a vital role in image building and as an export-oriented sector it makes a decisive contribution to the current account balance“, said the Minister.

Favourable review at the 2nd anniversary of the micro-credit programme

Two years ago Minister for Social Affairs Rudolf Hundstorfer established Austria’s first micro-credit programme. Its aim is to provide capital to unemployed company founders as well as small and one-person enterprises. After in-depth discussions and examination, 122 loans with a total volume of 1,401,698 euro have been made available to date. At the end of 2011, CARE Austria has become a cooperation partner of this programme. “We are highly pleased by the fact that generally all the company start-ups and measures safeguarding the continued existence of companies funded by us have been very successful”, emphasised the Minister.

Doris Bures at conference of Alpine transport ministers in Leipzig

Austrian Minister of Transport Doris Bures met with her counterparts from Germany, France, Switzerland, Italy and Slovenia at the Alpine transport ministers’ conference on 2 May 2012. This forum for intensifying cooperation among the Alpine countries was founded in 2001 to improve transport safety, incident management on transalpine routes and, in the medium term, transit traffic. A concrete result of the ministers’ efforts presented at the conference is www.acrossthealps.org, where all road users may inform themselves on the traffic situation in the entire Alpine region and on all transalpine routes – a unique networking platform in Europe!

CULTURE MEDIA SCIENCE**Vienna Festival 2012**

From 11 May to 14 June 2012 Wiener Festwochen (Vienna Festival) present 36 productions from 24 countries. 205 performances, including ten world premiers, will be staged at more than 30 venues all over Vienna.

Continuing the Vienna Festival's Verdi trilogy started last year, "La Traviata" will be the highlight of the music programme (directed by Deborah Warner, conducted by Omer Meir Wellber, and with Irina Lungu as Violetta).

In the contemporary music series, the festival management presents the new work of Italian composer Luca Francesconi "Quartet", remounting the production of Àlex Ollé – a member of the theatre group La Fura dels Baus – for Milano (conductor: Peter Rundel).

In the framework of the Festival's comprehensive programme of Austrian theatre plays, Vienna Festival Manager Luc Bondy produces Peter Handke's new play "The Pleasing Hours of Aranjuez" in cooperation with Burgtheater. Austrian director Ulrich Seidl stages "Bad Boys" based on texts by David Foster Wallace. Australian Oscar award winner Cate Blanchett will play the lead role "Lotte" in Botho Strauß' play "Big and Small", performed by the Sydney Theatre Company (new English translation by Martin Crimp; director: Benedict Andrews). "The Master and Margarita" is Simon McBurney's multi-faceted and masterfully staged adaptation of a novel by Mikhail Bulgakov, which he developed congenially for the stage together with his ensemble Complicite.

This year's "forum festwochen ff" is devoted to "integration". Three international and three Viennese artists created stage plays revolving around this issue. They will receive their world premiere in the framework of the Vienna Festival forum. These works include Alexander Nikolic's "New Gastarbeiter Opera", addressing the issue of labour migration with a lot of humour, and Oleg Soulimenko's "Made in Austria", presenting successful immigrants at the Danube Tower.

The project "Into the City" curated by Wolfgang Schlag pursues the goal of integrating people and places with very little cultural affinity into the Vienna Festival. Vienna's tenth district Favoriten, and especially Quellenstraße, were chosen as a venue. The series of "Into the City" events is kicked off with "Urban Sounds of Turkey" (12 May 2012). The musicians of "Hakan Vreskala & Band" and female DJ "Ipek" give an open-air concert fusing oriental and electronic sounds.

In the community weblog project "Post it!" more than 30 residents of Quellenstraße tell their personal stories about traffic, social coexistence and the characteristics of this neighbourhood. With his "radio motor caravan" Lukas Matthaer, a philosopher and director from Berlin, investigates the "Vienna of the addicts". In "Paradis Artificiels" he presents (anonymous) audio portraits of people with intense experiences of addiction. Filmmaking collectives shoot shorts with the dwellers of Favoriten.

Filmmakers, performance and sound artists will turn the spotlight on Wien Museum for a night. With these projects, the festival organisers wish to reach out to a wide spectrum of audience – from Vienna's Turkish communities to the typical fans of the radio station FM4. www.festwochen.at

klangfrühling Burg Schlaining 2012

"Schlaining Castle sound spring" will take place from 15 to 20 May 2012. The festival had been suspended last year as its two artistic managers, the pianists Eduard and Johannes Kutrowatz, had been fully booked during the Liszt Year 2011.

The stylistically very varied programme is ushered in with a gala in the hall of ceremonies of Schlaining Castle. The Kutrowatz brothers (piano) will perform together with Yi Liu (percussion). The works presented are by the two pianists, the composers Gerhard Krammar and Jenő Takács from Burgenland as well as by Ryuichi Sakamoto. The festival also pays tribute to jazz star Joe Zawinul (who would have celebrated his 80th birthday in July) by featuring his famous compositions "Birdland", "Cannonball" and "Mercy, Mercy, Mercy".

Under the motto "Strings On Air", "Radio String Quartett" and Klaus Paier (accordion and bandoneon) invite to a concert on 16 May 2012. "Grand Chamber Music" by Bach, Dvorak and Ginastera will be presented (with Johannes Kutrowatz on the piano) on 16 May 2012. Eduard Kutrowatz will enthuse the audience with "Bach & Rilke" on 18 May 2012. On 19 May 2012 the two artistic festival managers will again play the piano in "History Of Tango". The festival comes to an end with "Tanzgeiger" on 20 May 2012, promising "musical souvenirs" to the audience.

www.klangfruehling.com

Amadeus Austrian Music Awards 2012

The Association of the Austrian Music Industry (IFPI Austria) organises the 12th edition of the Amadeus Music Awards. The aim of this

event is to draw attention to Austrian music of all genres (except classical music). This year a total of about 50 artists – selected by 150 jury members – competed in 13 categories for the Amadeus award. The first selection was made from almost 800 works released between 31 May 2010 and 1 January 2012. On 21 February 2012 the nominees were presented. The fans could vote online for their favourites up to 1 April 2012. The Amadeus award ceremony took place at Volkstheater on 1 May 2012.

Award winners: Ludwig Hirsch was posthumously granted the IFPI Lifetime Achievement Award. “Entweder und Oder“ by Hubert von Goisern became the Album of the Year. The Song of the Year: Holstuoarmusig-bigbandclub – Vo Mello bis ge Schoppornou; Best Live Act: Andreas Gabalier, FM4 Award: M185; Alternative Amadeus Award: 3 Feet Smaller; Electronic / Dance: Parov Stelar; Hard & Heavy: Krautschädl; HipHop / RnB: Die Vamummtn; Jazz / World / Blues: 5/8erl in Ehr'n; Pop / Rock: Hubert von Goisern; German Pop Music (Schlager): Andreas Gabalier; Folk-Inspired Music: Die jungen Zillertaler.

Korean Cultural Centre opened in Vienna

To mark the 120th anniversary of official relations between South Korea and Austria (“Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation”), the Korean Cultural Centre was ceremoniously opened in Vienna on 3 May 2012 by Federal President Heinz Fischer in the presence of numerous guests of honour, including Korean Vice Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism Young-Jin Kwak. As suggested by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Fischer had supported the project personally. Chairwoman Mija Chon stated that the aim of the Cultural Centre was to familiarise the Austrian public with Korean art and culture. Ambassador Hyun Cho informed that some cultural events were planned for the anniversary year (e.g. “Cookin’ Nanta“ at Museumsquartier in Vienna on 23/24 June 2012). Cooperating with Eisenstadt, the Korean mega city Goyang will organise the first Haydn Festival from 24 to 28 October 2012.

Concordia Prize awarded

The prizes recognising outstanding journalistic achievements in the areas of human rights, democracy as well as freedom of press and information were handed over in a ceremony at Concordia Press Club in Vienna on the eve of the World Press Freedom Day (3 May 2012). The prize winners are Nina Horaczek for her

dedicated reports on asylum issues (category: human rights), the reporters of the news show (ZiB) of the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF) courageously and repeatedly standing up against political intervention (category: freedom of press) and Ágnes Heller from Hungary for criticising the Hungarian media laws (special prize). Tribute was also paid to Otto Schönherr for his lifetime achievements. Schönherr was editor-in-chief of the newspaper “Kleine Zeitung” (1954-1959) and the Austrian Press Agency (1959-1987). He has been firmly committed to the freedom of press and to quality journalism throughout his career.

Five new members for Science and Art Curiae

On 17 April 2012 five personalities were awarded the Austrian Decoration for Science and Art by Federal President Heinz Fischer and thereby became members of the Austrian Science and Art Curiae: Italian writer Claudio Magris, Austrian economic scientist Ernst Fehr, Canadian science philosopher Ian Hacking, German artist Rebecca Horn and Austrian painter Martha Jungwirth.

A maximum of 36 Austrian citizens (science and art each 18) and 36 foreigners may hold this decoration, forming separate curiae.

Ernst Fehr, professor of micro-economics and experimental economic research at the University of Zurich, is a prominent protagonist of the “psychological reorientation” in economics. He challenged the academic community once more by pioneering neuroeconomics – and incorporating game theory and social psychology in this new discipline.

Claudio Magris is one of the most eminent Italian experts in German language and literature as well as a brilliant cultural journalist (“The Habsburg Myth in Modern Austrian Literature” and “Danube. A Sentimental Journey from the Source to the Black Sea”).

Ian Hacking’s work focuses on science theory and linguistic philosophy based on Austrian philosophical traditions established by Ernst Mach, Moritz Schlick, Otto Neurath and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

German sculptor, performance artist and filmmaker Rebecca Horn (e.g. exhibition “Love and Hate“ at Museum der Moderne in Salzburg) explores historical events from an artistic perspective.

Painter Martha Jungwirth won renown in 1968 with an exhibition of the group “Wirklichkeiten”, of which Herzig, Kocherscheidt, Pongratz and Ringel were also members.

Increasing expenditure on research and development in Austria in 2012

According to estimates of the Austrian Statistical Office (Statistik Austria), Austria's R & D expenditure will increase by 4.2 per cent from the level of 2011 to 8.61 billion euro in the current year. Infrastructure Minister Doris Bures noted with satisfaction that this success was achieved despite the difficult overall economic situation. Direct funding of industry-related technology and research had the most powerful impact on the research ratio, stated the Minister.

Programmes allowing adults to acquire compulsory school leaving certificates

On 2 May 2012 Minister of Education Claudia Schmied submitted a bill on programmes allowing adult learners to acquire compulsory school leaving certificates. "With this law, which could enter into force on 1 September 2012 if adopted quickly by Parliament, we create a vital basis for helping school drop-outs to re-enter the educational system and to improve their labour market opportunities", said Minister Schmied.

Austrian universities of informatics launch campaign to attract students

IT has become an integral part of our everyday reality pervading all spheres of life. Austrian universities can hardly meet the present demand for well-trained IT experts. With their joint initiative "You can make IT", the Universities of Innsbruck, Klagenfurt, Linz, Salzburg, Vienna, the Graz University of Technology and the Vienna University of Technology as well as the Vienna University of Economics and Business want to spark the interest in computer science. Under the motto "informatics going on tour", scientists visit schools or accompany pupils on company visits. The comprehensive website www.youcanmakeit.at provides information on university facilities, study programmes and IT professions. Minister of Science Karlheinz Töchterle welcomes and supports this "very committed approach".

Töchterle: 20 years of Austria's successful participation in Erasmus

This year Erasmus, the most popular and best-known student mobility programme, celebrates its 25th anniversary. Austria participated in the programme for the first time in 1992 – then 893 students ventured abroad. In the meantime more than 5,000 students per year take advantage of this programme. Based on the total number of students, Austria is ranked fourth

among the 33 countries participating in the programme. As Austria has made maximum use of the funding provided by the EU in the past, it is now granted more money. The financial support for Erasmus students will be increased by 10 per cent. "This makes it even more attractive for Austrian students to participate in the programme", Minister of Science Karlheinz Töchterle was pleased to inform.

Research project "Tourism and Peace" at the University of Klagenfurt

Together with the Centre for Peace Research and Peace Education of the University of Klagenfurt, the World Tourism Organisation of the United Nations launched a new research project. Based on concrete case studies, it will show under which circumstances international tourism may promote peace. "This means that research on an important aspect of global tourism is being conducted in Austria", stressed Minister of Tourism Reinhold Mitterlehner.

Doris Bures signed technology cooperation agreement with Russia

In the presence of Federal President Heinz Fischer, Minister of Infrastructure Doris Bures and Russia's First Deputy Prime Minister Victor Zhukov signed a cooperation treaty between Austria and Russia on 23 April 2012. "I would like to facilitate the access of domestic enterprises to large, growing markets and to strengthen Austria's position as a location for innovation", stated the Minister. The agreement between Austria and Russia provides a sound basis to Austrian companies engaging in concrete projects in the infrastructure, transport, environment, health and energy sector. Russia planned to invest hundreds of billions euro in these areas, in which Austrian enterprises were global technology leaders, emphasised Minister Bures.

A tribute to inventor Josef Theurer

The European Patent Office nominated inventor Josef Theurer from Linz in the category "Lifetime Achievement" of the European Inventor Award (EIA). In the seven-year history of the EIA, Theurer is the first Austrian to enjoy the honour of a nomination. Josef Theurer had made "a major contribution to developing the European high-speed rail network". Today the company Plasser & Theurer founded by him is a global market leader in railway track-laying machines. The enterprise has filed more than 10,000 patent applications.