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Editorial

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to you, our loyal readers of “News from Austria”. It is therefore all the more regrettable that we have to inform you that this issue of the publication is the penultimate to appear also in English and French. Due to major changes in the usage of media and information services, “News from Austria” will be published only in German in the future.

We thank our non-German-speaking readers for their loyalty and are pleased to announce that the foreign-language services on the website of the Federal Chancellery will be enhanced to keep you informed. As from 1 July 2012 onwards, the Federal Chancellery will publish news in English on the English pages of its website www.bundeskanzleramt.at.

DOMESTIC POLICY

Parliamentary parties discuss the reform of democracy

On 31 May 2012 representatives of the parliamentary parties gathered to discuss ideas currently circulating with regard to the democratic reform agenda. The meeting did not only focus on plans to downsize the National Council, but also the current debate on incorporating more direct democracy mechanisms into the Austrian Constitution. All parties were in favour of introducing a standard procedure for plebiscites, which should, however, be subject to different requirements. The question how many persons had to sign a petition for referendum to prompt the government to hold a plebiscite and which topics were to be exempted from this regulation remained controversial. Besides restrictions of fundamental rights or international commitments, budget and tax issues were subjects for debate.

Joint position of the government leaders on eurobonds

The eurobonds model was a meaningful measure in the medium- and long-term, Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann and Vice-Chancellor Michael Spindelegger stated unanimously. Federal Chancellor Faymann reiterated once more that the fiscal pact and growth-promoting measures had to be given priority to guarantee the “calculability” of the budget. The Chancellor considered “EU project bonds” a viable idea. “Visions for the future” were required in the long term – and in this respect eurobonds were one model among many. Minister Spindelegger was pleased to inform that the fiscal pact was in general not disputed.

According to him, eurobonds were “a good project in the medium and long term”.

Brussels: praise for Austria’s low unemployment rate, but call for reforms

In the EU’s latest to-do list for Austria, the European Commission praised the fact the Austrian economy had increased faster in the recent past than that of the overall EU and that the unemployment rate had dropped to an exemplary low level. There was no other EU Member State with fewer jobless people. However, the labour supply would start shrinking in eight years, Brussels pointed out and recommended targeted counter-measures.

In view of the inefficient financial equalisation system between the Federal Republic, the Länder and municipalities, the low retirement age, the weaknesses of the educational sector, the excessive expenditure of the health system, the lengthy restructuring process in the wake of the emergency nationalisation of problem banks as well as inadequate measures to reduce the tax burden on labour costs, further reforms were required.

New Electronic Health File Bill submitted

Minister of Health Alois Stöger made a fresh effort to push forward with the Electronic Health File (Elektronische Gesundheitsakte/ELGA). The new bill will improve data protection considerably. Patients will be able to delete data from ELGA retroactively, while doctors will benefit from a longer transition period. The controversial opt-out rule will, however, remain unchanged. Each patient who does not object formally will join the new system automatically. “Significant simplification of administration” is given as a reason. The Minister was in any case confident that the previously sceptical Medical Chamber and the coalition partner would give the go-ahead.

New Volunteer Protection Act improves legal safeguards for volunteers

“The innovative law is the first legal instrument to promote voluntary activities. In addition, it sets forth rules for the voluntary social year, the voluntary environmental protection year, the Holocaust memorial service as well as the peace and social service in foreign countries“, Minister for Social Affairs Rudolf Hundstorfer stated to highlight the importance of the new legal provisions, which entered into force on 1 June 2012.

EUROPE ■ INTERNATIONAL**Federal President Fischer met with his Swiss counterpart Widmer-Schlumpf**

Swiss President Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf held talks on the tax agreement with Austria during her official visit to Vienna on 25 May 2012. At a meeting with Federal President Heinz Fischer and Minister of Finance Maria Fekter, the Swiss Finance Minister pointed out that she did not perceive any problems concerning the constitutionality of the agreement, at least from the Swiss perspective.

Federal President Fischer paid official visit to Vietnam

During his three-day state visit to Vietnam, Heinz Fischer met with President Truong Tan Sang on 29 May 2012. Intensified bilateral cooperation in the framework of international organisations such as the UN as well as trade and economic relations were some of the topics discussed. In addition, a “matter-of-fact dialogue” was held on human rights issues. President Truong Tan Sang emphasised that 40 years after the establishment of diplomatic relations the visit of President Fischer had raised cooperation to “a new level”. The heads of state agreed that Austria would support Vietnam’s efforts to improve relations with the EU, while the ASEAN member Vietnam would serve as a bridge between Austria and the Asian region. The two presidents as well as Austrian Minister for Economic Affairs Reinhold Mitterlehner signed several economic memorandums of understanding and contracts in the trade, energy, industry and tourist sector. On the same day Fischer met with Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, Chairman of the National Assembly Nguyen Sinh Hung and Secretary-General of the Communist Party Nguyen Phu Trong.

On 30 May 2012 Fischer travelled to Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), where he opened – together with Economic Minister Mitterlehner and President of the Economic Chamber Christoph Leitl – an Austrian-Vietnamese Economic Forum. Fischer participated in the Austrian Science Day at Saigon University on 31 May 2012.

Hungarian President Ader received by Federal President Fischer

Vienna was the destination of the first official visit of Hungary’s new President Janos Ader, who met with Federal President Heinz Fischer on 1 June 2012. This was described as “an important and nice signal” by Fischer.

However, President Fischer pointed out that there was “an occasional need for discussion”. When important decisions were taken in Hungary that also affected Austria (e.g. the bank transactions tax), Austria wanted to be “involved and informed in due time”. Fischer referred to the fact that Hungary had amended individual controversial laws such as the Media and Central Bank Acts. “Europe and Hungary are getting closer, and if we take greater account of our mutual concerns, we are heading in the right direction”, said Fischer.

EU Financial Framework and growth

In the framework of discussions about the EU Financial Framework for the period 2014 to 2020, Austria called for establishing a special Growth and Innovation Fund “to facilitate the implementation of key projects”, informed Secretary of State Wolfgang Waldner.

On 30 May 2012 Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann said that this was an opportunity to set the right course: “Measures helping to stimulate economic growth and to create jobs must have priority also in this context.”

14th Dalai Lama in Austria

The Dalai Lama ended his nine-day trip to Austria including stops in Carinthia, Salzburg and Vienna on 27 May 2012. He presented a public talk on the values of the modern society to an audience of about 10,000 at Stadthalle in Vienna. The religious leader and Peace Nobel Prize laureate also held private meetings with Federal Chancellor Faymann, Foreign Minister Spindelegger, Secretary of State Kurz and Cardinal Schönborn.

Praise for Austria’s participation in UN missions

In a personal telephone conversation with Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann, US Vice President Joe Biden praised Austria’s long-term participation in international UN missions. He expressed his thanks for Austria’s participation in the summit meeting of NATO nations and the members of the Partnership for Peace in Chicago in May as well as Faymann’s pledge to make a financial contribution to train and support the Afghan security forces after the withdrawal of the US-led troops in 2014. On 31 May 2012 the Federal Chancellor met with the Mayor of Washington D.C., Vincent Gray, to discuss the combat against poverty and unemployment.

ECONOMY**Rudolf Hundstorfer supports the inflow of workers to do jobs on shortage list**

The so-called Shortage Occupation List has been published recently. It specifies occupations with a shortage of skilled labour. The 25 occupations listed relate mainly to the engineering sector. Migrants with adequate skills will have easier access to the Red-White-Red Card, i.e. a residence and work permit in Austria. According to Minister for Social Affairs Rudolf Hundstorfer, about 500 skilled workers will migrate to Austria thanks to this measure.

Unemployment rose by 5.1 per cent

The situation in the Austrian labour market remains tense. The number of jobless persons rose by 4.4 percent to 231,077 at the end of May from the level of the previous month. In parallel, the number of participants in training programmes of the Public Employment Service went up by 7.4 percent to 70,638. Since the end of August 2011, the number of jobseekers has been increasing; a decline was reported only in January 2012.

In May the domestic unemployment rate stood at 6.2 percent based on the Austrian method of calculation. Based on EU statistics, Austria reported an unemployment rate of 3.9 percent in April (latest available data). Hence, Austria continues to have the by-far lowest unemployment rate in the EU. The number of employees climbed by 55,000 persons to 3.372 million at the end of May.

Reinhold Mitterlehner: Vietnam is a dynamic market with a great potential

Together with a trade delegation, Minister for Economic Affairs Reinhold Mitterlehner accompanied Federal President Heinz Fischer on a three-day state visit to Vietnam. In view of Vietnam's continuously high growth rates and strong demand for infrastructure investments, the Minister considers this country one of the most interesting markets in South East Asia with great opportunities for Austrian enterprises: "Vietnam is a highly dynamic market. The framework conditions in Vietnam are good, the country is a WTO member, there are double taxation and investment protection treaties safeguarding the interests of investors and excellently trained workers." Moreover, a free trade agreement with the EU was being prepared, stated Mitterlehner.

About 300 export companies from Austria are active in the country. According to Minister Mitterlehner and President of the Economic

Chamber Christoph Leitl, business opportunities would open up in the future, especially in the sectors of tourism, infrastructure, renewable energies and health technologies.

Austrian National Bank: banking sector is in good shape

In the EU's latest list of requirements for Austria, the European Commission described the commitment of Austrian banks in foreign countries, notably in Eastern and Central Europe, as a "challenge" entailing risks. The Austrian National Bank immediately reacted to this statement. The risk exposure in Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe should be "assessed very differently. (...) Undifferentiated global figures were inadequate risk indicators". The Austrian National Bank also informed that measures had been developed to reduce the risks of Austrian banks, which were implemented in consultation with the European Commission and local supervisory authorities (notably with regard to the loan-to-deposit ratio).

Low interest on Austrian bonds eases strain on budget

Concerns about increasing interest expenses in the wake of Austria's loss of the triple-A credit rating of the rating agency Standard & Poor's in January have proved to be unfounded. The interest paid by the Republic of Austria to lenders is dropping steadily. On 31 May 2012 the interest rate on ten-year government bonds temporarily dropped to below 2.1 percent – a new all-time low –, while it had still exceeded three percent at the beginning of the year. Besides Austria, Germany and the USA are the countries benefiting most from their reputation of being safe havens.

Lower Austrian high-tech company as a "global player"

In Thomasberg near Edlitz Franz List runs a high-tech enterprise in the aircraft segment, which has recently doubled its production premises. "It is no exaggeration to say that we are building the world's most modern production facility for private jet interiors", stated company boss List. The investment volume totalled 14 million euro, and 180 new employees would be recruited (current number of employees: 470 persons). The components for aircraft interiors are cut with a laser device, then the surface is ground and polished. The company offers excellence in workmanship and uses state-of-the-art technology for surface treatment.

EDUCATION ■ MEDIA ■ SCIENCE**Linz University: international praise for a young university**

In the “Times Higher Education Ranking – THE 100 Under 50” drawn up for the first time, Johannes Kepler University Linz made it to the remarkable 41st rank. This ranking looked exclusively on “young” universities founded less than 50 years ago. Linz University is the only Austrian university listed among the top 100.

This ranking serves as “a clear warning to the traditional elite universities”. They were still better than the young institutions but: “The old universities do not have a monopoly on excellence,” stressed Phil Baty, editor of the Times Higher Education Ranking.

“Phoenix 2012” for the first time awarded to innovative companies

Last week the Ministry of Science awarded the new “Phoenix Prizes” to pay tribute to successful university spin-offs. The “Phoenix 2012” in the category “Young Enterprises” went to the company superTEX composites (a spin-off company emerging from the University of Innsbruck) for developing a freely mouldable material. The “Phoenix Women’s Prize” paying homage to innovative female entrepreneurs went to Evercyte (a spin-off company of the Vienna University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences), which is active in cell research. Bionic Surface Technologies became the winner in the category for newcomers “Phoenix Junior”. The mission of the company emerging from the University of Technology of Graz is to improve the aerodynamics of surfboards, boats, airplanes and wind power plants based on bionic microstructures. The aim of the Phoenix Prize is to raise awareness of the links between academia and the business community.

Extended programme period for remedial German classes

Since the academic year 2006/07, the system of remedial German classes for irregular pupils with non-German mother tongue has been enhanced continuously.

In the last six years remedial German courses have proved to be an indispensable tool for teaching and improving the pupils’ skills in the language of instruction (German) and for promoting social integration in the classrooms, as demonstrated by the findings of a research project of the Institute of Educational Research, Innovation and Development of the

Austrian School System. As the two-year programme was set to expire at the end of the academic year 2011/2012, Minister of Education Claudia Schmied and Secretary of State for Integration Sebastian Kurz succeeded in prolonging the programme by another two years.

Philosopher Jürgen Habermas receives two awards in Vienna

German philosopher and social researcher Jürgen Habermas received two awards at Vienna’s City Hall on 21 May 2012: the Erwin Chargaff Prize for Ethics and Science in Dialogue as well as the Honorary Prize of the Viktor Frankl Fund of the City of Vienna for Meaning-Oriented Humanistic Psychotherapy. The prizes were presented to Jürgen Habermas by Vienna’s Mayor Michael Häupl.

Oliver Lehmann new head of the Club of Science Journalists

The spokesperson of the Institute of Science and Technology (IST) Austria and co-editor of “Universum Magazin”, Oliver Lehmann, has been elected as the new chairman of the Club of Education and Science Journalists.

The Club of Education and Science Journalists (founded in 1971) has more than 150 members and acts as a mouthpiece of science and education in Austria. Last but not least, it grants awards such as the title “Scientist of the Year”.

Improved weather forecasts are to help prevent famines in eastern Africa

A current project is expected to lead to significant improvements of the short- and medium-term weather forecasts and warning services for eastern Africa. The project focusing on agricultural applications is managed by the Central Institute for Meteorology and Geodynamics (ZAMG) in Vienna and funded by the European Space Agency (ESA). Its aim is to identify risks of famine at an earlier stage and to improve food security by providing support to the farmers of the region, informed ZAMG at the project kick-off in Vienna on 24 May 2012.

Thanks to their valuable experience in applying satellite measurement techniques, the Vienna University of Technology as well as the Laxenburg-based International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) participate in the project, which will be completed within a period of one and a half years.

CULTURE**Spotlight on Lower Austria:
“Time Art Lower Austria 2012”**

“Time Art Lower Austria” showcases outstanding contemporary positions of artists living in or having special ties with Lower Austria. The two exhibition venues of Landesgalerie (artistic manager: Alexandra Schantl) are the Dominican Church in Krems and Shedhalle (designed by architect Hans Hollein) in the cultural precinct of St. Pölten.

The first exhibition “Up from the Skies” in Krems (closing on 14 October 2012) is devoted to the work of Manfred Wakolbinger. The show presents a representative cross-section of his sculptural work of the last three decades but also recent videos and photos.

www.zeitkunstnoe.at

Other current exhibitions:

The Hermann Nitsch Museum in Mistelbach stages an exhibition of works by Heinz Cibulka titled “In the Rhythm of Light and Darkness” (until 30 November 2012). It features the artist’s typical four-photo combinations as well as digital collages and multimedia works of the recent years. www.mzm.at

Kunstmuseum Waldviertel in Schrems is the venue of the show “The Lower Austrians. I am from Lower Austria“ by Makis Efthymios Warlamis (closing on 13 January 2013). On his quest for identity, he presents mainly portrait paintings of both prominent and unknown people from Lower Austria. The museum and gallery are situated in a sculpture park, which also accommodates an open-air arena theatre, a chapel and the “Irmisul pillars”.

www.daskunstmuseum.at

At this year’s exhibition at the Schallaburg Castle near Melk titled “The Golden Byzantium and the East” visitors may admire 400 exhibits (on loan from 60 owners from all over Europe), including the Gold Treasure of Preslav. In addition, films, animated films, 3D reconstructions as well as audio recordings give a lively picture of the Byzantine Empire and Constantinople. www.schallaburg.at

The temporary exhibition “Well-hatted” at the Palace of Artstetten (until 1 November 2012) provides insights into the history and role of the hat: from the first “hat traces” in Europe in the 10th century to the end of the 19th century, when the ladies discovered this fashion accessory for themselves. By wearing opulent hats, they highlighted their social status. The permanent exhibition “For Heart and Crown” documents the life of Archduke Franz Ferdi-

nand of Austria, whose last resting place is in the summer residence of the imperial family.

www.schloss-artstetten.at

The renovation of the Abbey of Herzogenburg founded on 18 August 1112 took twelve years. The historic building has been restored to its original splendour just in time to celebrate its 900th anniversary. To mark the occasion, the exhibition “Time Witness of Eternity” showcases the Abbey’s art collections. It will be rounded off by concerts and a series of events titled “Guests of the Abbey”.

www.stift-herzogenburg.at

St. Pölten Baroque Festival

Under the motto “Dialogue of Worlds”, the 7th Baroque Festival of St. Pölten from 9 to 23 June 2012 will make a statement in favour of global peace and tolerance, informed artistic manager Caroline Berchotteau.

The first night takes concert-goers to the China of the 16th, 17th and 18th century. Jean Christophe Frisch, flautist and founder of the “Ensemble XVIII-21 Le Baroque Nomade” will present the “Concert in the Forbidden City” at the Franciscan Church (9 June 2012). Andreas Martin (lute) will interpret works by Bach in the former synagogue on 14 June 2012. The cembalo duo “Le Petit Concert Baroque” by the Lesaulnier sisters will perform at the summer refectory on 15 June 2012. On 17 June 2012 Ensemble Mikado and Die Strottern will explore the common features of early music and new Viennese folk songs at the synagogue, where Ronald Bergmayr and trio auturja will present Ottoman music (based on Arab and Persian elements with Byzantine and Jewish influences), including compositions by Taner Türker and Helmut Scherner on 21 June 2012. Music from the Spanish world with Raquel Andueza (soprano) and Pierre Pitzl (baroque guitar) will be performed at the institute “Congregatio Jesu”. The festival concludes with ensemble Accentus Austria led by Thomas Wimmer at the Franciscan Church on 23 June 2012. www.barockfestival.at

Lower Austrian Theatre Festival 2012

The annual theatre festival offers a varied programme of all genres – from buoyant comedies, lavish musicals and first-rate operas and operettas to classic tragedies, including 29 premieres. The festival takes place at 23 different venues from 6 June to 8 September 2012. Highlights are a stage version of Til Schweiger’s box-office hit “Keinohrhasen“ at Stadttheater Berndorf and “Titanic – The Musical” on the Staatz Rock Stage.

At Thalhof in Reichenau theatre-goers may enjoy the satyr play “Ach Arthur“ (19 July), “Der Atem“ by Thomas Bernhard (29 July) and classic double acts by legendary cabaret artist Farkas (2 August). The programme of Herrenseetheater Litschau includes “Die letzten Tage der Menschlichkeit“ with cabaret artist Karl Ferdinand Kratzl, while the Melk Summer Festival presents “Die Pöstin“ (based on the novel “Pope Joan” by Donna W. Cross; starring Katharina Stemberger). Shakespeare will lure the audience to Perchtoldsdorf with “Macbeth” and to Rosenberg with “As You Like It”, while the Culture Summer Festival of Laxenburg follows its proven concept of staging local comedies with “Der Graf von Laxenburg” under its new manager Adi Hirschal. The Wachau Festival in Weissenkirchen (artistic manager: Marcus Strahl) presents the comedy “The Camel through the Needle’s Eye” by Frantisek Langer. The Nestroy Festival in Schwechat celebrates its 40th anniversary with “Einen Jux will er sich machen” (known as “The Matchmaker” or “On the Razzle” to English-speaking theatre-goers). The Haag Summer Theatre Festival produces Kleist’s “The Broken Jug”. The Gutenstein Festival pays homage to Ferdinand Raimund. “Brüderlein fein im Bleichgarten“ with songs and couplets by the poet will be premiered in the open theatre tent on 12 July 2012. The theatre programme of Baden includes “The Three Musketeers”, “Countess Maritza”, and “Der Bauer als Millionär”, while Theater im Bunker in Mödling will restage Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart”.

The summer festivals of Lower Austria will, of course, also present musicals such as “A Chorus Line“ (in Stockerau), “Evita“ (in Baden) and “Like a Virgin“ (in Melk) as well as classical music, e.g. Verdi’s “Rigoletto“ (in Gars/Kamp) or Donizetti’s “Don Pasquale“ (in Klosterneuburg). www.theaterfest-noe.at

“Viertelfestival NÖ – Mostviertel 2012“

200 brass musicians from the Lower Austrian region “Mostviertel” created a sound sculpture at the opening of the festival comprising 67 art and culture projects (running until 12 August 2012). The motto of this festival focusing on regional initiatives is “...constant transformation – analysing, setting things in motion, changing”. On 12 May 2012 a ceremony was conducted to commemorate the armistice of 1945 and to light a torch of peace in Erlauf. An exhibition about local ceramic art was opened in Scheibbs. In Rabenstein/Pielach the exhibition “Three Villages” juxtaposes photos of a

village in Mostviertel, a village in the western Himalayas and an Indian village taken by seven photographers from six countries. An art installation in Pöchlarn highlights the importance of the dam building. A “Mandala for Cows” was created on the Eibl mountain in the Türnitz region. www.viertelfestival-noe.at

Golden Palm for Michael Haneke

Filmmaker Haneke received the much-sought-after trophy for the second time. His death drama “Amour” starring Jean-Louis Trintignant, Emmanuelle Riva and Isabelle Huppert has made a strong impression in Cannes. Ulrich Seidl’s film “Paradise: Love” also competed for the award. As Austrian film art makes a decisive contribution to world cinema, the discussion on an adequate funding policy was rekindled. The Austrian public film funding budget (including financial aid to institutions and art house cinemas) currently totals almost 70 million euro. It is made available by different sources, e.g. the Austrian Film Institute (ÖFI) and Film Location Austria (FISA). Haneke’s “Amour” will be released in the cinemas of Europe and the USA in autumn.

Vorarlberg: Feldkirch Festival 2012

The festival embarks on a musical trip through Scandinavia (focusing on Finland and Norway) from 6 to 17 June 2012. The programme includes the chamber opera “Fröken Julie” (“Miss Julie“) – Ilkka Kuusisto’s adaption of a Strindberg drama (directed by festival manager Philippe Arlaud) – and works by Jean Sibelius, Edvard Grieg, Kaija Saariaho and Einojuhani Rautavaara. www.feldkirchfestival.at

Modern art in Vienna: Pomeranz Collection at the Jewish Museum

The sign with the text “Foreigners Everywhere“ created by the Claire Fontaine art collective depicts the motto of an exhibition of contemporary avant-garde works revolving around upheavals in life as well as issues related to remembering and history (until 7 October 2012). They belong to the Pomeranz Collection, a private Foundation established in 2007 by Jana and Eduard Pomeranz, who support contemporary art movements in the tradition of Jewish art collectors. The show curated by Ami Barak features Marina Abramovic & Ulay, Yael Bartana, Mircea Cantor, Paul Chan, Elmgreen & Dragset, Stano Filko, Ceal Floyer, Ion Grigorescu, Sigalit Landau, MadeIn (Xu Zhen), Boris Mikhailov, Ciprian Muresin, Roman Ondák, Adrian Paci, Markus Schinwald, Taryn Simon and Franz West. www.jmw.at

ENVIRONMENT ■ SUSTAINABILITY ■ TOURISM

Mitterlehner comments tourism statistics: growth thanks to record winter

Despite stiffening international competition, Austria is an increasingly popular winter travel destination as demonstrated by the latest statistical data on tourism published by the Austrian Statistical Office (Statistik Austria). “Thanks to well-aimed infrastructure investments, innovative programmes and marketing measures aligned with the tourism strategy, we managed to strengthen our position as the number one winter sport country”, Minister of Economy and Tourism Reinhold Mitterlehner commented the record number of foreign and domestic guests.

The excellent winter season also provided stimulus to the tourist industry in the current summer season. “In line with Austria’s tourism strategy, we concentrate on the most important unique selling propositions, i.e. the Alps, the Danube and lakes as well as cities and culture, in our foreign markets”, emphasised the Minister confidently.

Bavaria and Austria reaffirm intensive energy partnership

Together with his Bavarian counterpart Martin Zeil, Minister of Economy and Energy Reinhold Mitterlehner visited ‘Limberg II’ – currently Europe’s most modern pumped storage hydro power plant – in Kaprun. The two ministers signed a joint memorandum on cooperation in the area of energy supply at the meeting. “Bavaria and Austria have engaged in an intensive energy partnership for many years. We would like to intensify our cooperation in the wake of the reorientation of Germany’s energy policy, from which both countries will benefit. The Alpine region will become Europe’s green battery and energy hub”, Reinhold Mitterlehner stated ambitiously.

Austrian Environment Certificate awarded to 21 schools

On 21 May 2012 Minister of Education Claudia Schmied and Minister of the Environment Nikolaus Berlakovic awarded the Austrian Environment Certificate to 21 schools in seven Länder. Criteria for awarding the Austrian Environment Certificate designed by Friedensreich Hundertwasser are the use of energy and water, the quality of food, the equipment, waste avoidance and separation, procurement, cleaning services as well as environmental education and pedagogy.

“Thanks to the commitment of the schools awarded the Environment Certificate, schools become a place of learning and living for all those involved. These schools make a verifiable contribution to environmental and climate protection, health promotion and consumer education”, emphasised Minister Schmied. The Environment Minister also praised the schools: “In all these schools the enthusiasm and commitment is palpable”. www.umweltzeichen.at

National Parks of Austria launch awareness-raising campaign

As areas with a high nature conservation value, the Austrian National Parks make a vital contribution to preserving the natural heritage for future generations. However, many people are not aware of the wide range of functions fulfilled by the National Parks that have beneficial effects on nature, society, tourism and the economy. Therefore Minister of the Environment Nikolaus Berlakovich launched the campaign “National Parks of Austria“, which will raise awareness of this umbrella brand. In the framework of environmental education programmes, children and young people are to be sensitised to relevant topics by involving them in activities such as a freecard design contest. The Science Prize 2012 to 2013 of the National Parks of Austria will also focus on research in and around National Parks as well as other vital issues. www.nationalparksaustria.at

A “power plant” on the facade of the Vienna University of Technology

The renovation of the building previously accommodating the Institute of Applied Synthetic Chemistry (“Chemiehochhaus”) and the main auditorium of the Vienna University of Technology is underway. With this project, the university wants to set an ecological milestone. The building boasts Austria’s largest photovoltaic system, which has been integrated into the facade. The electricity generated will be used to cover the energy consumption of the technical equipment of the building, e.g. computer servers, the kitchen and lighting system. Moreover, the passive solar design for high-rise buildings is being further developed (“Energy Plus Building”) to improve and optimise weather tightness, night ventilation, electricity consumption as well as heat and humidity recovery. The thermal rehabilitation of the building is a university research project. Its aim is to prove that “Energy Plus Highrise Buildings” are feasible – not only technically but also economically. The project is to be completed by the end of 2013.