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Political year starts with internal meetings of the parties

Austria's parliamentary parties started the new working and election year 2010 with internal meetings. The beginning was made by the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) on 8 January 2010 with a two-day meeting of the executive committee in Bad Tatzmannsdorf (Burgenland). Deliberations focused on the combat against unemployment and the reform of the education system based on the SPÖ's call for increasing the capacity of all-day schools and expanding the "New Middle School" pilot project. Minister of Education Claudia Schmied wanted to double the number of school pilot projects to 20%. Chancellor Faymann stressed vis-à-vis the coalition partner – the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) – that demand for school places had risen, e.g. in Tyrol and Upper Austria. A 10%-increase could no longer satisfy the growing demand, which had climbed to 50% in Vienna. The demand for places in all-day schools also exceeded the supply. Schmied plans to present the results of a poll among 700,000 parents at the end of January.

Another item on the agenda was the coalition dispute about the centre of first reception for asylum seekers in Eberau (Burgenland) propagated by ÖVP Minister of the Interior Maria Fekter. The centre has met with the fierce opposition of the regional SPÖ group led by Governor Hans Niessl, especially in view of the forthcoming elections to the regional parliament. Chancellor Werner Faymann stated that policy-makers had to accept the result of the planned plebiscite. Questioning the need for a third centre of first reception for asylum seekers, he also pled for alternative solutions. In the meantime, the governing parties agreed to a common stance on this question: "We returned to a more rational approach to the asylum issue", stressed the Chancellor after the meeting of the Council of Ministers on 12 January 2010. Questions like shorter asylum procedures, the general necessity of a new centre of first reception for asylum seekers or alternative locations should be clarified by the end of the month. Smaller centres in various Länder could be an alternative, said Faymann. A solution could be found only in close cooperation with the municipalities and the Governors. Vice Chancellor and Minister of Finance Pröll also welcomed the common approach. The two coalition partners agreed that the pressure on the reception centres for asylum

seekers in Traiskirchen (Lower Austria) and Thalham (Upper Austria) had to be reduced.

Economic policy and security were the key issues discussed at the closed-door meeting of the ÖVP in Altlenzbach (Lower Austria; 10/11 January 2010). In view of the financial crisis, Minister Pröll advocated the total nationalisation of the Austrian National Bank (OeNB). Currently the Federal Republic of Austria owns 70% of the OeNB, 30% are held by banks, insurance companies and interest representations. Pröll announced his plan to take over this block of shares and mentioned a purchase price of up to 50 million euro. He explained that the OeNB played an important role in bank supervision. The participation of the banks and interest representations in the OeNB had "historical" reasons but was "obsolete" in today's financial sector, stated the Minister. The SPÖ and the opposition parties described this as a "step long overdue". The key task of a Central Bank was to supervise financial institutes – this could be guaranteed only if the state had the sole control. In the wake of the economic crisis, the ÖVP aimed at supporting small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) and extending current support programmes. 25 million euro are to be made available for the expansion of SMEs into new markets in 2010.

The Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) held its traditional New Year's meeting on 10 January 2010 at Vienna's Fair Hall. Party chief Heinz-Christian Strache announced the sole claim of his party to lead Austria's third political camp. In the preliminaries of the regional elections in Vienna, Burgenland and Styria, he agitated in the usual manner – with harsh slogans against immigration, the abuse of social benefits and the system of proportional representation of the governing parties.

The Greens focused on issues such as the combat against poverty, climate protection and education at their internal meeting at Seggau Palace in Styria (14/15 January 2010). Party leader Eva Glawischnig called for "ethical standards" in politics due to various scandals (Skylink, Hypo-Alpe-Adria Bank) and the recent corruption allegations against Uwe Scheuch, head of the "Freedomites in Carinthia" (FPK). On 16 January 2010, the regional party congress of the FPK unanimously agreed to the split-off of the regional group of the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ) to join the FPÖ. Scheuch was re-appointed as FPK Chairman with a clear majority (90.15%). Josef Bucher, BZÖ Federal Party Chairman, "took note" of the result. ■

Federal President Fischer pays state visit to China

Nine years have passed since an Austrian head of state paid a visit to the People's Republic of China. But now bilateral relations are to be revived at the top level. On 18 January 2010, Federal President Heinz Fischer departed for a five-day visit to China, with stops in Beijing and Shanghai. He is accompanied by his wife Margit, four government officials, numerous Members of Parliament as well as a large trade and research delegation. The official programme includes political talks with head of state and party chief Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao. Agreements are to be concluded in the health and economic sector.

The composition of the trade delegation (with more than 120 members) led by the Vice-President of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (WKÖ), Richard Schenz, clearly shows that the main goal of the state visit is to intensify economic relations. China is Austria's most important trading partner in Asia. Alongside with India, it is considered the most promising market for European business people. Bilateral trade recorded a relatively stable development last year despite the economic crisis. According to the Austrian Statistical Office (Statistik Austria), the trade volume totalled 4.8 billion euro in the first three quarters of 2009. Exports to China increased by 5.3%, notably in the sectors infrastructure, mechanical engineering, energy and environmental technology.

Together with the government's commissioner for EXPO 2010 Hannes Androsch, the Federal President will lay the cornerstone of the Austrian EXPO pavilion. ■

Spanish PM Zapatero in Vienna

Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Zapatero presented the priorities of the EU Presidency recently taken over by Spain during his visit to Vienna on 14 January 2010. The main subjects of the talks with Chancellor Werner Faymann were the common combat of the EU Member States against the economic crisis as well as the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty, which entered into force in December. Intensive deliberations were also held on EU support for the Caribbean state Haiti devastated by an earthquake disaster, which had to be coordinated. Faymann expressed his deep concern and pledged support for Haiti,

especially regarding the search for missing people, medical aid and water treatment. (Austria has so far made available 800,000 euro.)

Both heads of government emphasised their intention to rally support in the EU for the financial transactions tax, which had been propagated by Austria for some time, as well as for the stricter supervision of financial institutions. Faymann also called for close cooperation in the social sector, education and research to strengthen the EU's competitiveness and to ensure equal opportunities. ■

EU Commissioner-designate Hahn convinced the EU Parliament

Austrian Commissioner-designate for Regional Policy Johannes Hahn convinced the Committee of the Regions of the European Parliament of his expertise after a three-hour hearing on 14 January 2010. He gained approval from all parliamentary groups. At this hearing Hahn "totally rejected the re-nationalisation" of regional policy in the EU and announced "zero tolerance" for the misappropriation of funding. ■

Western Balkans Initiative

Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger hopes that the EU accession negotiations with Croatia will be concluded in 2010. In the programme of the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (OFR) "Pressestunde" on 17 January 2010 he announced that next week a "Western Balkans Initiative" would be launched jointly with Greece. ■

General Settlement Fund 2009

On 12 January 2010, the Board of Trustees of the General Settlement Fund looked back on the first six months of the final phase of Austria's compensation payments to NS victims. After an amendment of the law in July 2009, about 20,700 claims for compensation amounting to 1.5 billion euro had been received. 4,600 claims had already been settled by transferring money to 5,400 persons, informed the Chairwoman of the Board of Trustees, Speaker of Parliament Barbara Prammer. Many claims covered several persons, Prammer explained the difference between the number of claims and the number of recipients of compensation payments. 210 million US dollars were allocated to the Fund set up in 2001. ■

Minister Pröll pleads for summit of German-speaking countries

A summit meeting of the German-speaking European countries will be held to give impetus to the stagnating negotiations of the EU ministers of finance on banking secrecy and interest tax on savings. This was agreed on between Austrian Finance Minister Josef Pröll and his German counterpart Wolfgang Schäuble at a meeting in Berlin on 16 January 2010 as no solution of the conflict was in sight at the Council of EU Finance Ministers on 19 January 2010.

Besides Germany, Austria and Luxembourg, also "countries outside the EU such as Switzerland" should participate in the summit meeting next week, stated Pröll after his talks with Schäuble. This was the first bilateral meeting with the new German minister of finance after the change of government in Germany.

Austria and Luxembourg still reject the automatic exchange of information (and consequentially the end of banking secrecy) as long as third countries such as Switzerland do not enter into similar agreements. Expressing "general reservations", Austria and Luxembourg continue to block the respective EU directives and treaties. Austria would not change its position on the tax package at the EU meeting on 19 January 2010, "if the Commission and Council do not allow a solution", stressed Pröll vis-à-vis the Austrian Press Agency (APA) and Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF). According to Pröll, Schäuble showed "understanding" for Austria's position.

Background: In accordance with the applicable EU savings tax directive, Austria and Luxembourg have to lift banking secrecy and participate in an information exchange mechanism as soon as an agreement on the exchange of information based on the OECD standards is reached with the European third countries and the USA. ■

Record year 2009 for car trade

Thanks to the scrapping premium ("eco-premium") – a bonus to trade in old cars for new ones – the Austrian car trade achieved record sales in 2009 despite the economic crisis. Last year the best sales result since 1992 was reported: 8.8% more cars were sold, corresponding to 319,403 new motor vehicles licensed. Without the scrapping premium the sales figures would have

remained on the level of 2008 (294,000). In 2010 the number of new cars licensed is expected to drop again to this level, based on estimates of car industry representatives.

The scrapping of motor vehicles licensed for the first time before 1996 was funded with a total of 1,500 euro per vehicle by the government and car dealers. 30,000 owners of old cars benefited from this campaign presented as an environmental protection measure. The discount was granted only to motorists buying new low-consumption cars. The premium could be claimed as from April 2009. After double-digit losses in the first three months of 2009, motor vehicle sales figures started booming in July 2009, peaking at 44% in some months. Based on the estimates of importers and car dealers, about 20,000 to 25,000 more cars were sold than this would have been the case without the scrapping premium. ■

Austria boasts second-lowest unemployment rate in the EU

In the global crisis year 2009, 260,309 people (annual average) were jobless, this is a plus of 22.6% from the prior-year level, informed Minister for Social Affairs Rudolf Hundstorfer on 8 January 2010. However, a European comparison showed that Austria had done well as its average unemployment rate of 4.7% was still the second-lowest in the EU. The unemployment rate in the EU-27 was about 9.3% in 2009.

2010 would be another difficult year for the labour market. Therefore, funding for active labour market policies and subsidies for apprentices would be increased by 69 million euro to 1.454 billion euro, said Hundstorfer. "Starting with labour market package III, we will clearly focus on qualification in 2010. People with more training have better labour market opportunities", emphasised the Minister for Social Affairs. ■

With 0.5 percent in 2009, inflation dropped to lowest level since 1953

With a rate of 0.5% for the entire year 2009, inflation in Austria dropped to the lowest level since World War II. According to the latest data of the Austrian Statistical Office (Statistik Austria), a lower inflation rate – minus 0.7% – had been reported only in 1953. The main reason for this trend were the low petrol and fuel oil prices. ■

Film miracle from Austria: Golden Globes to Haneke and Waltz

Filmmakers from Austria have been triumphing at international festivals for some years – in Berlin, Venice and Hollywood. In the night to 18 January 2010, film director Michael Haneke, 68, and actor Christoph Waltz, 53, won Golden Globe awards. Both Austrians had won prizes in Cannes before. Haneke received the Grand Jury Prize many years ago and walked away with the Golden Palm in 2009. His black-and-white film “Das weiße Band“ (“The White Ribbon”) exploring the social and structural roots of violence in north Germany before the outbreak of WWI. was named Best Foreign-Language (i.e. non-English) Film.

Waltz playing the role of the SS officer Hans Landa in Quentin Tarantino’s “Inglourious Basterds” won in the category Best Supporting Actor.

Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann enthusiastically praised the prize winners: “The recognition of the outstanding achievements of these two personalities will provide incentives and motivation to many cultural creators from Austria and pave the way for future success”. Besides, Haneke’s film had made a “deep impression” on him. He extended his best wishes to the two artists for the forthcoming Oscar awards.

Minister of Culture Claudia Schmied paid homage to Michael Haneke as one of the “world’s best film directors producing meaningful films and who was not afraid of focusing attention on sensitive issues in his film narrations. The prize to actor Christoph Waltz shows the remarkable wealth of talents on which the European and Austrian film industry can draw. This success is another incentive to realise the film funding model proposed by the Chairman of the Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP) Karlheinz Kopf after increasing the budget of the Austrian Film Institute (ÖFI) and securing the cooperation agreement between the Austrian film industry and the Austrian broadcasting corporation. He has my full support“. ■

Touring Austria: Minister Schmied campaigns for “new school”

Minister of Education Claudia Schmied is touring Austria until February to present her “concept for a new school system under the motto ‘achievement needs confidence’” to teachers.

Pedagogues active in different projects of the Ministry of Education are invited to the events in the nine Länder. They will have the task of acting as multipliers and opinion-makers and of networking among one another.

They represent projects such as the Leadership Academy, the New Middle School or “Networking of innovative schools”. These individual projects are to form a “Strategy Network”. Teacher representatives were not included – a fact that is criticised by them.

www.netzwerke-im-dialog.at ■

Vienna Wiesenthal Institute: progress towards full operation

After a turbulent year, the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI) is taking an important step towards full operation. In February the go-ahead will be given for digitalisation of the documents made available by the Jewish Community of Vienna (IKG). In 2009 a conflict arose between IKG President Ariel Muzikant and the founding head of the Institute, Anton Pelinka, on the use of the archives for research purposes. In the wake of this dispute, the previous Executive Committee resigned. As the new VWI Chairman of the Executive Committee, Georg Graf, recently stressed, the irritation had been overcome. The members of the Academic Advisory Board, who had also resigned, will be back on board (new appointment in 2010).

As the Executive Committee member Bertrand Perz explained, the IKG had agreed to make available all the Holocaust-relevant material.

The new VWI Business Manager is contemporary historian Bela Rasky with a proven track of international experience. The Vienna Wiesenthal Institute predominantly financed by the Federal Republic and the municipality of Vienna is expected to become fully operational at Palais Strozzi in Vienna’s Josefstädterstraße in 2012. ■

Albertina: Brus & Rainer

Among all the superb exhibitions currently on show in Vienna, one deserves special mention: “Brus & Rainer: On the Horizon of Things – On the Horizon of Senses” at Vienna’s Albertina. 70 joint works (mixed media) created by Arnulf Rainer (born in 1929) and Günter Brus (born in 1938) in 2008 are showcased until 14 February 2010. www.albertina.at ■

Unique: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner at Museum der Moderne in Salzburg

Museum der Moderne (MdM) in Salzburg presents a comprehensive show of the German Expressionist Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938) until 14 February 2010. The first Kirchner solo exhibition at an Austrian museum comprises 130 oil paintings, drawings, prints and photos. Many of the works exhibited have not been presented to the public before. The curators gathered these unique masterpieces from 49 international lenders in Switzerland, Germany, the USA, Liechtenstein and Austria, among them the art museums of Basel and Bern, Kirchner Museum Davos, Städel, Frankfurt am Main, Groninger Museum, Museum Würth, Künzelsau, Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Hilti Art Foundation, Vaduz, and the Modern Art Museum, Foundation Ludwig Vienna.

The thematic focus of the exhibition is on the artist's stays in Dresden 1908-1911, Berlin 1911-1917 and the early years in Davos 1918-1920. The later period up to Kirchner's suicide – he shot himself in the heart in 1938 – is illustrated with some selected works. In Germany Kirchner tried to captivate the jungle of cities with their scintillating characters, while the landscape of Bünden in Switzerland inspired him to develop a new style of mountain painting.

Kirchner searched tirelessly for a new German art, for new expressive styles and formal languages – from his beginnings as a member of the artists' group BRÜCKE (e.g. with Emil Nolde, Max Pechstein, Erich Heckel and Cuno Amiet) to his tragic end.

Only two exhibitions on the work of Kirchner have taken place in Austria to date: at Bank Austria in 1996 and before that at Festspielhaus in Salzburg, where the notorious Nazi exhibition "Degenerate Art" had been reproduced.

As one of the curators, Lucius Grisebach, explained, Austria had been "busy with its own artists of the classical modern movement after the war, therefore there was practically no public reception of Kirchner in Austria".

A publication containing an essay by Grisebach was issued by the publishing house DuMont to accompany the exhibition. It presents numerous photos taken by Kirchner and a richly illustrated biography; all works exhibited are reproduced in colour. www.museumdermoderne.at ■

Albertina: successful show on Impressionism will be extended

Which Impressionist painted on Cuban cigar boxes? How spontaneous did Van Gogh really work? Which secret does an X-ray of a Renoir reveal? How do you recognise an Impressionist painting? With which media did the impressionists paint? The original exhibition at Vienna's Albertina – which has been extended till 14 February 2010 – answers these and many other interesting questions. It is based on the findings of a five-year research project allowing a glimpse into the development as well as the painting techniques and styles of the Impressionist movement. History of art is placed on an equal footing with art technology.

With about 130 paintings by 45 artists – among them Caillebotte, Cézanne, Courbet, Degas, Gauguin, Manet, Monet, Pissarro, Renoir, Signac, Sisley, Toulouse-Lautrec and van Gogh – the world of the French dominated Impressionism is analysed – from its origins in outdoor painting to the optical colour experiments of Pointillism and Post-Impressionism.

The different perspectives of the artist, the restorer and the onlooker are in the foreground. The role of the light and the effects of physical phenomena on Impressionist painting are examined. A systematic analysis of painting techniques and methods provides insights into the history of creation of the works of art. Surprising findings are obtained by reconstructing painting processes and modifications to the work by the artists themselves or other painters as well as from research on the state of preservation and the history of restoration. Original tools of the artists such as brushes, palettes, paint tubes, paint boxes and easels convey an authentic experience of the Impressionists' working conditions in free nature. The centrepiece of the show are 75 masterpieces from the Wallraff Richartz Museum & Fondation Corboud, Cologne. The exhibition is rounded off with key works from the collection of Albertina as well as exhibits from private lenders and international galleries.

Visitors of this exhibition are also recommended to attend the Albertina's permanent show "Masterpieces of Modernism – The Batliner Collection", with works by Braque, Chagall, Kandinsky, Miró, Picasso, Richter, Katz. www.albertina.at ■

3raum-anatomietheater: deranged Columbus by Joachim J. Vötter

The author Joachim J. Vötter from Graz had written two fascinating pieces of which Hubsi Kramar staged (prize-winning) productions at 3raum-anatomietheater in recent years: “Die Walzermembrane“ (“The Waltz Membrane”) and “Schreber – Eine Nervenromanze“ (“Schreber – A Nerve Romance”). According to Kramar, these works address the “paradigm shift in recent history“. The first play is devoted to the visionary architect and musician Ferdinand Schuster and takes stock of the Fascist madness of the Austrian type. The second play is about Court President Daniel Paul Schreber (1842-1911), the son of the pedagogue and paediatrician Daniel Gottlieb Moritz Schreber, a pioneer of “German remedial exercise“; the “Schrebergarten” – the German word for “allotment garden” – was also named after him, which is popular still today, not only in Vienna. Undoubtedly it was also due to his rigid education and self-discipline that Daniel Paul Schreber went crazy – and became lucid. He authored the book “Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken“ (“Memoirs of My Nervous Illness”). Finally, he managed to be recognised again as a fully-fledged citizen after having been declared incapacitated.

Recently, the last play of the trilogy received its world premiere at 3raum-anatomietheater: “Der Weltintendant“ (“The World Stage Manager”). On 12 October 1492, a rowboat was lowered from the ship “Santa Maria” into the sea off Guanahani island. Christoph Columbus, a Monsignor, the notary of the crown and four rowers (prisoners), were on board. The setting of the play is basically this “seemingly unimportant zone“ (Vötter) between the frigate and the beach, between the “old” and the “new” world. Columbus, absolutely sure to have discovered “India”, meditates depressively over the sense of his mission, believes in less and less and questions “everything predetermined” – the power system supporting his expeditions with the aim of “Christianising” the “natives“ and of shipping treasures, notably gold, to Spain. His increasingly erratic and freely floating thoughts are observed suspiciously and written down by the priest, the royal servant but also the dull rowers as the grandiloquent monologue of Columbus – who wants to stay on the island as a new, practically naked human – poses a threat to the customary world of repression and its notions “We must not deceive

the natives, we must not deceive the native in us”, he says to the dismay of everybody, and the rowers can be calmed down only with difficulty by promising them to return home soon.

Another important supporting character is Isabella of Spain. She reflects on her life and mission – which she considers to be above all the conquest of the Holy Land, the eradication of the (culturally advanced) Islamic traces in Spain – on her deathbed in the presence of her beloved jester – Klaus Windbichler is excellent in this role. Only the fidgety jester seems to be lucid enough to realise that the crude ideas of his ruler are mad, he is laughing out loud, but of course remains caught up in his role. Joachim J. Vötter shows in his complex text how an “old world” suffocates even its leading protagonists and how difficult, even dangerous but necessary it is to discover and think “the new” with an obsolete range of notions, to create “a translation“ – as the subtitle of the play reads.

All this is reflected atmospherically in Hubsi Kramar’s production. It is an enchanting moment when the sheet on which Isabella lies is turned into a sail. The cast is outstanding – above all the actor playing Columbus and the “World Stage Manager” Andreas Patton, who recently gave a brilliant performance also in the stage adaptation of Thomas Bernhard’s “Frost“. It is almost frightening how well Erwin Leder brings the character of the “Monsignore“ with his ascetic-inquisitorial attitude to life: sinister, driven by hidden passions, full of evil-missionary zeal. The notary – Markus Kofler – often agrees with him but only as long as the interests of the crown are not put at risk. He wants to record everything meticulously for posterity but he lacks the intelligence to understand the realm of thoughts of the future Viceroy Columbus even though he senses the subliminal rebellious in him. Lilli Prohaska as Queen Isabella is the counterpart to the all-male society, impressively impersonating religious madness. The simple-minded rowers bring laughs to the audience – Klaus Windbichler (in a second role), Sascha Tscheik, Bernd Charabara and Thomas Reisinger – especially since they do not only stare into space but also speak in a broad Austrian dialect. The matching, pleasantly unobtrusive costumes were created by Hanna Hollmann. “The World Stage Manager” is performed through 30 January 2010, Wed. to Sat. 7.30 pm. This play presented in the quaint theatre in the former University of Veterinary Medicine is not be missed. www.3raum.or.at ■

Amendment to Anti-Doping Act presented to EU working group

At the beginning of 2010, the Amendment to the Federal Anti-Doping Act entered into force.

The main elements of the Amendment have been presented at international level – at the latest meeting of the EU anti-doping working group in Brussels on 14 January 2010. Pia Haschke, Austria's new expert for international anti-doping affairs, outlined the central elements of the Amendment:

- Adherence to the prohibited list of the European Anti-Doping Convention (WADA Prohibited List 2009) will be ensured in the future.
- Lifelong exclusion of adult athletes and coaches banned for doping offences from the federal sports funding system.
- Obligation of athletes to repay financial resources granted from the federal sports funding system.
- Creating a legal basis for intensifying anti-doping cooperation among customs authorities, prosecuting authorities and NADA Austria.
- Providing information on package leaflets of medicinal products.

After the expert's statement, the new anti-doping spot created by NADA Austria and the RED-WHITE-RED TEAM broadcast on TV was presented. The conference participants were impressed and acknowledged Austria's efforts in the combat against doping. ■

Minister of Sport and 60,000 spectators cheer ski fliers

The ski-flying event on the Kulm hill in Tauplitz during the weekend was a total success.

Around 60,000 spectators watched the two-day ski-flying competitions live. It goes without saying that the outstanding accomplishments of the Austrian eagles contributed to the fantastic atmosphere. After Slovenian ski-flying specialist Robert Kranjec leapt to victory on Saturday, Austrian superstar Gregor Schlierenzauer became Sunday's winner. Winning the ski-flying World Cup for the seventh time, he became the most successful ski flier of all times. Minister of Sport

Norbert Darabos congratulated the victor personally on the spot and thanked the host team around Hubert Neuper for the perfect organisation. ■

Darabos congratulated hockey team on sensational title

The Austrian men's hockey team sensationally won the title of the EuroHockey Indoor Nations Championship in Almere (Netherlands) on 17 January 2010. In the exciting finals, the team led by Elmar Stremitzer defeated defending Champion Russia after an extra time goal (4:3).

Minister Norbert Darabos congratulated the team on this historic success: "Many Austrian sports fans are enthusiastic about this completely unexpected title won in the mecca of hockey sport. I am pleased that an important international victory has been achieved in a team sport. I applaud the whole team for the great performance at this event in the Netherlands. The European Championship title will also provide strong motivation to our national handball team as the European Handball Championship will start next week in Austria. The hockey team has in any case shown that great things can be achieved even by outsiders". ■

Handball Championship will be opened with match Austria-Denmark

The European Football Championship 2008 had been a great organisational success, and now the next large-scale international event on Austrian territory is drawing near. On 19 January 2010, the 9th EHF European Men's Handball Championship will start in Innsbruck, Linz, Wiener Neustadt and Graz, in which 16 nations will participate.

After numerous warm-up games and an intensive training programme in Bad Leonfelden, the Austrian national team starts the tournament with the opening game against European champion Denmark in Linz. Minister of Sport Norbert Darabos, who will be present at the event, hopes that the positive trend – which could be observed in the friendly match against Germany – will be reinforced: "At the last B World Cup held in their country, the Austrians performed excellently thanks to the strong support of the audience. I am convinced that this will happen also this year and I wish our team a lot of success!". ■