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Agreement on more all-day schools

The governing parties – the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) and the People’s Party (ÖVP) – agreed on increasing the number of all-day schools. At the meeting of the Council of Ministers on 13 October 2009, they also reached a consensus that education and research were key factors in over-coming the economic crisis, and with that, priorities of the government. Chancellor Faymann stated that the government partners were now “making better progress“ in the debate within the grand coalition about all-day schools, a new law on the employment of teachers and the school reform. In view of the current economic crisis entailing skyrocketing budget deficits and huge debts of all EU Member States, the measures taken so far, e.g. economic stimulus packages, active labour market policy and the tax reform, had to be complemented by new initiatives. Investments in education were high on the agenda. Now about 6,400 euro were spent on each pupil. This was a “top amount in Europe, but it did not lead to top performance. Efficiency had to be increased”, explained Faymann. He remained unimpressed by the first negative reactions of the teachers’ union against an increase in teaching hours. Numerous studies provided evidence that all-day schools and individual tuition helped to improve the performance of the pupils. The currently about 90,000 places in all-day schools had to be increased to 120,000 by 2013.

To promote the reconciliation of work and family lives, different types of all-day schools had to be further developed as an “important pillar of the education system“, stressed Minister of Finance Josef Pröll. He also expressed his understanding for the appeal for more money by Minister of Education Claudia Schmied. A higher budget would have to be discussed, stated Pröll. ■

Women demand mandatory quotas

At the meeting “Women in politics – more women into politics“ held at the seat of the Austrian Parliament in Vienna on 7 October 2009 a lively discussion was held on mandatory quotas for women and strategies to increase the share of women in politics. Experts and politicians of all political groups participated in the event.

Only 27.9% of the Members of the National Council are women; the Federal Council has a women’s share of merely 25.8 % - far too low, as all speakers emphasised at the meeting. “I ack-

nowledge that it would be necessary to introduce a mandatory quota to bring about a change“, stressed Minister for Women Affairs Gabriele Heinisch-Hosek (SPÖ). She also stated that the debate about more women in politics had been “long overdue”. A change was necessary, not only in federal politics but also at the level of Länder and municipalities. She hoped that the National Action Plan for Equality would show effects by 2013. Speaker of the National Council Barbara Prammer (SPÖ) explicitly supported a quota system. To achieve a women’s share of 50 percent, she considered “almost all means legitimate“. “We are currently losing a great potential”, said Secretary of State for Family Affairs Marek (ÖVP) in support of the demands of her women colleagues. The objective was “clear“: women had to be represented “at all levels” based on their share in the population. The Greens called for sanctions if quotas were not complied with. The Freedom Party (FPÖ) and the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ) rejected quota systems. ■

Council of Senior Citizens meets at the seat of the Austrian Parliament

At the ninth plenary meeting of the independent Council of Senior Citizens held at the seat of the Austrian Parliament on 8 October 2009, the representatives of the Social Democrats (SPÖ) and the People’s Party (ÖVP) requested an increase in pensions by 1.9% in 2010, instead of the 1.5% provided for in the law. An adjustment to the pensioners’ price index was a legitimate goal to safeguard the livelihood of more than 2 million pensioners. The Council of Senior Citizens requested “full acceptance“ as the “fifth social partner“, e.g. in government talks with chambers and unions. It condemned agitation against pensioners in the media (“the grey threat“, “false-teeth“ generation). President Heinz Fischer and Chancellor Faymann referred to “unacceptable expressions” and called for mutual respect. ■

Law rehabilitating NS deserters

On 7 October 2009, the governing parties (SPÖ and ÖVP) as well as the Green opposition party agreed on a bill on the political rehabilitation of deserters of the Wehrmacht and victims of the NS injustice system. Deserters, war traitors, conscientious objectors and self-mutilators will be recognised as combatants against the NS regime without examining individual cases. ■

Joint meeting of the governments of Austria and Hungary

The governments of Austria and Hungary held their third joint working meeting in Eisenstadt (Burgenland) on 15 October 2009. Key subjects for debate were the economic crisis, the EU and internal security issues.

On this occasion, Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann rejected once more the demands of Czech President Vaclav Klaus for an amendment to the EU Reform Treaty of Lisbon. Human rights or claims by displaced persons should not be belittled, said Faymann. (Klaus has in the meantime stated that he would no longer make ratification dependent on exemptions in the Treaty and accept guarantees that the Beneš decrees would not be challenged.)

Both sides underlined their close bilateral cooperation. 39 projects amounting to 48.3 million euro had been approved to promote cross-border cooperation on transport, energy and the environment. Bajnai thanked Austria for the “solidarity“ one year ago, when Hungary received crisis aid totalling 6.5 billion euro from the EU. ■

EU Commission President Barroso opened European House in Vienna

The new “House of the European Union” in Vienna’s centre, opposite the stock exchange, was ceremoniously opened on 16 October 2009. EU Commission President José Manuel Barroso, Federal President Heinz Fischer, Vice-Chancellor and Minister of Finance Josef Pröll, President of the European Parliament Jerzy Buzek, EU Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner and Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger were among the guests of honour.

The speakers agreed that the new European House should above all help “bringing the EU closer to its citizens“. Barroso described the new EU premises as a “flagship“, Spindelegger referred to them as an “interface between the EU institutions and the population“. One day earlier Barroso had held talks with Fischer, Faymann and Pröll. The question of the future Austrian EU Commissioner had not been addressed. ■

Israel’s Foreign Minister in Vienna

Israel’s Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman met with Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger in

Vienna on 14 October 2009. Besides bilateral issues and the relations between Israel and the EU, the informal talks also focused on the Middle East conflict and the nuclear conflict with Iran. (In November Austria will chair the UN Security Council.)

Minister Spindelegger called on Israel “to stop its policy of illegal settlement credibly, also in East Jerusalem, and to dismantle its outposts” erected illegally on Palestinian territory since 2001“. Israel should also end the “humanitarian misery“ in the Gaza Strip. Israel flatly rejected to stop its settlement activities. After the meeting, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported that the relations between Israel and Austria were “very good” despite different opinions. ■

Foreign Minister Spindelegger pays an official visit to Moscow

In his talks with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov in Moscow on 5 October 2009, Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger stated that he was pleased about Russia’s readiness to support Austria “strongly” during its chairmanship of the UN Security Council. Russia was an indispensable international cooperation partner, emphasised Spindelegger. The Minister also stated that it was Austria’s goal to put the protection of the civilian population in armed conflicts back on the top of the UN agenda. ■

Foreign Minister Spindelegger: Kosovo is crucial for stable Balkans

On 8 October 2009 Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger paid an official visit to Albania and Kosovo. The main subject for discussion was the approximation of Albania and Kosovo to the EU, which was supported by Austria. Austria had recognised Kosovo only ten days after its independence from Serbia in February 2008. Kosovo was a “key factor in the long-term stabilisation of the Balkans“. A peaceful, multi-ethnic Kosovo, where also the Serbian minority could live in dignity and security, remained a priority goal, said Spindelegger with regard to the local elections in November, which would be considered a test for the Kosovar government in Pristina. In the first elections held in Kosovo an “encouraging signal for the future of all Kosovars” should be given. ■

Several-billion-euro package for the Austrian export sector

After adopting a first programme to support the export sector in July, the Ministry of Finance plans a larger follow-up programme. The government will issue export guarantees worth several billion euro to revive the significantly shrinking exports. According to the daily "Der Standard" (8 October 2009), the export guarantees will total between 2 and 3 billion euro.

Based on these plans, attention will be focused on credit insurers. Export companies contact credit insurers to assess the risk of default and to limit the damage if the customer becomes insolvent. Due to the drastic deterioration of credit ratings, the risks of many exporters are too high and therefore are no longer hedged against, stated the head of the Austrian Foreign Trade Promotion Organisation of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (WKÖ), Walter Koren, in "Der Standard".

Moreover, credit insurers themselves had difficulties in re-insuring their own risks. This gap is to be filled by the Republic of Austria. So far the government's re-insurance had covered "non-marketable risks", i.e. exports to non-OECD members such as Ukraine. The scope of re-insurance is to be widened still in autumn. The Federal Republic plans to enter into an agreement with credit insurers under which the government could also re-insure exports within the OECD and the EU. However, this measure has to be approved by the European Commission, which has given the green light for similar packages in France and Great Britain.

The Ministry of Finance is already negotiating details with credit insurers. Government re-insurance (2 to 3 billion euro) should be available up to the end of 2010.

The financial resources are to be provided under the existing liability limit of Oesterreichische Kontrollbank (OeKB) which has not been exhausted completely. Kontrollbank has a liability limit of 50 billion euro to furnish security for long-term exports (more than 24 months) and to hedge against the political risks of foreign investments. OeKB boss Rudolf Scholten welcomed the fact that "the portfolio of instruments" had been expanded. However, the Republic of Austria insists on premiums and a better-fortune clause, stipulating that insurers have to repay a share of the profits made during a subsequent economic upturn to the government.

The credit insurers warn against high expectations. If the credit insurers do not accept the government's proposal, there is a Plan B. The state would not only act as a re-insurer but could also issue direct export guarantees. ■

Slovakia gives the go-ahead for oil pipeline to Schwechat

Thanks to the oil pipeline between the OMV refinery in Schwechat and Bratislava, Austria is directly connected to the existing Russian pipeline network with a total length of 3,000 km. As announced at a press conference, Minister for Economic Affairs Reinhold Mitterlehner and his Slovak counterpart Lubomir Jahnatek had signed the respective memorandum of understanding in Bratislava on 16 October 2009.

The planned "Bratislava-Schwechat pipeline" is 60 km long and is expected to have an annual total capacity of between 2.5 and 5 million tons of oil. The OMV and the Slovak government-owned pipeline operator Transpetrol are in charge of the pipeline construction project, which will make possible direct supplies of crude oil from Russia to Austria, explained OMV Deputy CEO Gerhard Roiss. Construction would start in 2011 and is expected to be completed in 2012. ■

Strong foreign demand for food made in Austria

Food from Austria proves to be crisis-resistant. Foreign trade in domestic foodstuffs has remained relatively stable, especially in the most important export markets Germany and Italy. Agrarmarkt Austria (AMA) Marketing even expects a new record in the quantitative volume of foreign trade in agricultural products in 2009. Due to lower prices, the value of food deliveries dropped by 10% during the first six months. Agricultural exports will probably total 7.2 billion euro in the entire year 2009, compared to 7.96 billion euro in 2008. The volume of agricultural exports had quadrupled from the level of 1995, AMA boss Stephan Mikinovic was pleased to report at the world's largest food fair "Anuga" in Cologne on 5 October 2009. Since Austria's accession to the European Union, the annual export growth rates were between 7 and 20%. The most important goods are milk and dairy products, beverages, bakery products and meat as well as meat preparations. ■

Frankfurt Book Fair: Schmied supports Austrian publishing houses

“We Austrians are really doing fine here in Germany“, said Minister of Culture Claudia Schmied at the inauguration of the Austrian stall at the Frankfurt Book Fair on 14 October 2009, alluding to the huge success of Austrian authors and publishing houses in Germany. 43 out of a total of 161 Austrian publishers present themselves in Frankfurt. The Minister emphasised that she wanted to create “optimal conditions for our authors, our publishing houses and book trade. The improved subsidy scheme for publishers, guaranteed resale price maintenance as well as the new rules for quoting sources in textbooks were concrete steps to improve these conditions“. Moreover, she underlined the importance of digitalisation for the literary world. Strong emphasis will be placed on this subject also at the Vienna Book Fair from 12 to 15 November 2009, where the latest technological developments will be presented in the programme section “Digital Worlds of Reading“.

The joint stall of the publishing houses is organised by the Federation of Austrian Booksellers (Hauptverband des Österreichischen Buchhandels), the Austrian Foreign Trade Promotion Organisation and the Association of the Book and Media Sector (Buch- und Medienwirtschaft). As President of the Federation of Austrian Booksellers Gerald Schantin explained, the sentiment among Austrian booksellers was “excellent“. A sales increase of 9.1 percent had been reported in September. Since the beginning of the year, sales had increased by 2.5 percent. ■

Minister of Culture at UNESCO General Conference in Paris

Minister of Culture Schmied participated as the representative of the Austrian federal government in the biannually held UNESCO General Conference in Paris on 8 October 2009. In her address to the General Conference she stressed Austria’s firm commitment to the activities of UNESCO in the field of education and culture. She also underlined that UNESCO’s key objectives Africa and gender equality were of paramount importance and were also supported by Austria. According to Minister Schmied, education made a decisive contribution to achieve progress in this area. She also stressed the

importance of a free and fair access to education for all people. Moreover, the Minister of Education reiterated the great significance of multilingualism and particularly of mother tongue teaching in the educational system. “The International Year of Languages 2008 demonstrated that languages and multilingualism are key issues on the international agenda“.

Schmied then highlighted the priorities of Austria’s cultural policy, stating that the country’s main concern was “to create a framework for cultural diversity, the preservation of cultural heritage in all its diversity and the dialogue of cultures“. In this context, she emphasised the importance of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The “Memory of the World“ Programme was also of crucial importance. Last but not least, she drew attention to UNESCO’s devotion to human rights and the freedom of the press. ■

High Austrian award goes to music historian Henry-Louis de la Grange

On 9 October 2009, Minister of Culture Schmied conferred the Austrian Cross of Honour for Science and Art, 1st Class, granted by the Federal President, on French music historian Henry-Louis de la Grange. In her presentation speech, she described the internationally renowned Gustav Mahler researcher as “a fascinating and extremely modest personality, who does not enjoy being in the limelight but always turns the spotlight on Gustav Mahler“. The work of the scholar focused “the attention of the international music research community on Vienna“. In this way he has contributed “substantially to creating Austria’s cultural identity“. Henry-Louis de la Grange was born in Paris in 1924. His pioneering research was promoting awareness of the oeuvre of Gustav Mahler in academia. The Médiathèque Musicale Mahler in Paris founded by him has earned itself the reputation of an exemplary research centre for music of the 19th and 20th century that also recognises Austria’s importance in the history of music. ■

Music Festival “Wien Modern”

Offering the “widest spectrum of composer portraits” in its history, the festival for contemporary classical music “Wien Modern” will be held from 29 October to 21 November

2009. A dense programme of no less than seventy events will be presented at twenty different venues in Vienna. The festival motto "Televisions" highlights the relation between the medium television and contemporary classical music. The "Televisions" series at Konzerthaus focuses on "excavations and re-discoveries" that have been made in the cooperation process since the 1950s. "Wien Modern" devotes a comprehensive musical portrait to Robert Ashley, who has worked with the medium TV and used it to revolutionise opera. His TV operas are shown in full length. Other "portraits" feature the Norwegian experimental musician and composer Ole-Hendrik Moe and the Austrian Bernhard Gander.

After the Salzburg Festival (Salzburger Festspiele), the Holland Festival and the Venice Biennale, the "Wien Modern" festival also pays tribute to Edgar Varese (1883-1965). His work is analysed in documentary concerts, sound projects and talks, by establishing references to contemporary electronic music as well as to composer, music theoretician and architect Iannis Xenakis (1922-2001), with whom he shares a common retrospective. The two artists cooperated, for example, on the Philips Pavilion for the World Fair in Brussels in 1958 – the "Poème électronique" created for this occasion will be performed at "Wien Modern" in the cupola hall of Vienna's Technical University. The programme devoted to Xenakis highlights his works for orchestra and ensemble, including the rarely performed "Terretektonik", in which 88 musicians of Radio Symphonie Orchester Wien (RSO) – led by Peter Eötvös – will perform seated among the audience in Konzerthaus.

The festival also focuses on younger Austrian composers: Eva Reiter and Philipp Quehenberger. The list of original individual projects is long: "theatercombinat" is another adaptation of Elfriede Jelinek's "Bambiland" at Anker Brotfabrik (7 November 2009), choreographer Christine Geig and composer Bernhard Lang present their latest joint work "TrikeDouble-Three" at Tanzquartier (as from 19 November 2009). Gartenbaukino will not only host the "concert parties" in its bar "philiale" on Saturday evenings, but also present the silent film classic "The Phantom Carriage" with live music recently composed by the duo "KTL" (starting on 7 November 2009). "Dschungel Wien Modern" offers a varied music theatre and performance programme for children. www.wienmodern.at ■

Austrian film art also dominates Viennale 09

For many years Austrian film has played only a minor role at the Viennale Film Festival, which this year takes place from 22 October to 4 November. In the recent past, Austrian films have garnered unprecedented attention at global level. Austrian filmmakers and actors are considered world-class, winning awards in Hollywood, Cannes, Venice and Berlin. Viennale also responds to this world-wide attention – with the strongest presence of Austrian film art after a long time. The special programme section "Home Run" is presented at Künstlerhaus at prime time. Festival Director Hans Hurch selected a total of 24 feature films, documentaries and shorts. On 22 October 2009 the festival will for the first time in its history be opened with an Austrian film – "La Pivellina" by Tizza Covi and Rainer Frimmel, which had received its world premiere in Cannes. The film made with amateur actors tells the story of a little girl who had been abandoned by her mother on the outskirts of Rome and finds a temporary home with circus artists.

Jessica Hausner's "Lourdes" – winning several trophies after its international premiere at the Venice Film Festival – will be shown for the first time in Austria at Viennale. Sylvie Testud, who is confined to a wheelchair, participates in a group trip to Lourdes, where she is healed (temporarily?). But this creates jealousy and discontent in the other pilgrims. With its distanced images, the film reminds of a cool jazz composition.

But most Austrian films will celebrate their world premiere at Viennale, among them "Blutsfreundschaft" ("Initiation"), the new work by Peter Kern. The leading role is played by Helmut Berger, who became famous for his brilliant performance in Visconti films. In the film a young man and his neo-Nazi gang raid a social institution and are then hidden by a 80-year-old homosexual laundrette-owner (Berger).

A film by British Peter Whitehead, to whom a special Viennale tribute had been devoted in 2006, is the American-Austrian coproduction "Terrorism Considered As One Of The Fine Arts" about a spy in an anti-terror department.

Among a total of six Austrian feature films selected for the festival are "Koma" ("Coma") by Ludwig Wüst and "Domaine" by the Austrian Patric Chiha living in France.

Moreover, ten fascinating documentaries will be screened at the festival, e.g. "Frauenkarawane" ("Winds of Sand, "Women of Rock") by Nathalie Borgers. Her work deals with patriarchal structures and independently acting women, wandering for several weeks through the desert to the next watering hole. Houchang Allahyari created a portrait of Ute Bock, Vienna's grande dame of social work, with all her contradictions. In her film "Durch die Welt nach Hause" ("Homebound through the World") actress and director Andrea Eckert pays homage to writer Frederic Morton, who had to escape as Fritz Mandelbaum from the Nazis in 1940.

The programme of short films is also very exciting, including works by Sigi A. Fruhauf, Sasha Pirker, Heinz Emigholz, Sabine Marte, Rainer Gamsjäger and Philipp Fleischmann.

The Austrian Film Archives explore the beginnings of Austrian filmmaking about one hundred years ago in the programme section "Early Austrians". The selection of films dating back to 1906-1918 focuses on Austrian cinema pioneers, among them photographers, technicians, writers but also actors or craftsmen involved in the actual production of the film.

www.viennale.at ■

Leopold Museum: Edvard Munch and the Uncanny

In the exhibition titled "Edvard Munch and the Uncanny", Leopold Museum showcases more than 200 works by Munch, Ensor, Goya, Böcklin, Gauguin, Moreau, Schiele and other artists of the 19th and early 20th century (ending on 18 January 2010). "Symbols of the Subconscious", "Dreams and Nightmares", "Ghosts and Visions" or "The Uncanny Home" are themes of this show that invites the visitor to look into the question how the uncanny is depicted in the arts.

The show concentrates on French, Belgian and German symbolism and traces the early influence of psychological findings in the works presented. The Munch Museum in Oslo contributed 35 main works by its "hero" to this outstanding exhibition. The remaining exhibits come from international and Austrian museums, including paintings, drawings and prints by Odilon Redon, Max Klinger, Otto Modersohn, Fernand Khnopff, Victor Hugo, Franz von Stuck, Charles Meryon or Alberto Martini.

The exhibition is rounded off with interesting events, for example Olivier Messiaen's "Quatour

pour la fin de temps" ("Quartet for the End of Time") performed on 21 November 2009 at 3 p.m. www.leopoldmuseum.org ■

Exhibition by the Lauder Chabad School in Vienna-Leopoldstadt

From February 2008 to October 2009 young people attending the Lauder Chabad School in Leopoldstadt (the second district of Vienna) gathered in numerous workshops to reflect on their religious-cultural views and identity: through painting, illustration, film and photography. Through their artistic activities the pupils aged between 15 and 18 years improved their individual perception and adjusted attitudes influenced by stereotypes. The works of art are shown at Stadion Center, the shopping mall next to the Ernst Happel Stadium, 1020 Wien, Olympiaplatz 2 (1st floor) from 29 October to 11 November 2009. The exhibition has been organised in the framework of the district partnership Leopoldstadt-Brooklyn founded in 2007. The exhibits will travel to Brooklyn, while the works created at the partner school in New York will be presented in Vienna.

The history of the stadium named after the great Austrian footballer and coach Ernst Happel (1925-1992) has not always been glorious. During the NS period (1938-1945), the stadium was also used as military barracks, a strategic centre and a collecting point for the deportation of Jewish citizens. In September 1939 Viennese Jews were detained in the stadiums. 1038 prisoners were deported to the Buchenwald camp, only 60 men survived. Since 13 November 2003 a memorial tablet has reminded of the murderous crimes. ■

Sensational poster show at MAK

From 25 November 2009 to 10 January 2010 the Vienna-based Museum of Applied Arts (MAK) will present different aspects of graphic design in its show "2x100 Best Posters".

"100 Best Posters 08. Germany Austria Switzerland" displays contemporary works that participated in this year's poster competition. "100 Best Posters from Austria" covers the spectrum of graphic art – from early "corporate identities" in the art of the "Secession" movement around 1900 to the high demands on modern graphic design.

www.MAK.at ■

“Fit for Austria” and WGKK: exercise on prescription throughout Vienna

Lifestyle diseases are gaining ground. Apart from the wrong diet, it is lack of exercise that makes people first fat and then sick. Therefore Vienna’s insurance institution for employees (Wiener Gebietskrankenkasse/WGKK) and “Fit for Austria“ (an initiative of the Ministry of Sport, the Austrian Federal Sports Organisation, and the umbrella organisations ASKÖ, ASVÖ and SPORTUNION) launched the project “Healthy by moving – the doctor’s prescription for active preventive healthcare“ to motivate people to do health-oriented exercise.

The aim of “Healthy by moving“ is to prevent coronary-heart diseases, obesity, the metabolic syndrome and its consequences as well as type 2 diabetes mellitus. Furthermore, diabetics should be supported in coming to terms with their disease through moderate exercise. After a successful pilot phase, “Healthy by moving“ will be realised throughout Vienna. From now on, a general practitioner will be able to write an exercise prescription if a patient shows critical results in preventive checkups. The programme “Healthy by moving” has been scheduled for a period of three years.

“The Austrians are gaining weight”, is the alarming conclusion presented by Minister of Sport Norbert Darabos: “The average body weight of young men conscripted for national service rose from 71.5 kg to 74.4 kg only within the past ten years. The share of those tipping the scales at more than 100 kg has more than doubled – from 3% to almost 6.5%.” This has severe consequences: “In 1991 3.3% of the Austrian conscripts were obese, in 2002 this number had doubled”, stated Norbert Darabos. According to international estimates, every second adult could be obese in 2040. Then about 850,000 adult Viennese would carry excessive body fat, this is six times the number reported today.

Diseases resulting from overweight are high blood pressure, coronary-heart diseases or diabetes. Small wonder that the number of diabetics is rising. Based on projections, the number of diabetics could increase by 47 percent up to 2050 from the level of 1999. Almost every 10th Austrian would then be a diabetic. High blood pressure and coronary-heart diseases associated with it have been the main cause of death in Austria. ■

Integration through sport with Vastić

Football star Ivica Vastić is the central figure of the new youth book “Together we win”, which addresses integration through sport. Based on an initiative of Minister of Sport Darabos, the book is distributed to all schools across Austria participating in the pupils’ football league.

The experience of Ivica Vastić, who was born in Croatia, is to serve as an example for young Austrians with a migration background. The dark-haired model athlete aged about 40 ended his career only in 2008.

Minister of Sport Darabos reiterates the importance of integration also for sport: “Sport is ideal to overcome barriers between people. In sport togetherness, fair play and mutual respect are crucial.“ ■

Minister of Sport Darabos praised the achievements of Hermann Maier

Minister of Sport Norbert Darabos was full of praise for skiing star Hermann Maier, who had ended his career surprisingly.

“Many Austrian athletes have become world stars over the past decades, but Hermann Maier is one of the very few enjoying the status of a legend already during his active career. For more than one decade he had kept the national and international sports community in suspense, be it through his meteoric rise to fame at the end of the 1990s – from a simple bricklayer to an overall World Cup winner, be it with double gold at the Olympic Games in Nagano in 1998 and his horrible downhill fall, or be it with his breathtaking comeback after severe injuries. Just like hundreds of other sport fans in Austria, I am grateful to Hermann Maier for his achievements in the interest of our country. 54 world cup wins, four large crystal globes, three gold medals at world championships and two Olympic victories made him Austria’s most successful skier since the beginning of the world cup age. His popularity and role model effect go far beyond his original sphere of activity. Hermann Maier’s decision to end his unique career has to be respected wholeheartedly. I wish him good luck for his future outside the race tracks“, said Darabos. ■