

■ Waltzing to a modern tempo

Hannes Androsch

Hannes Androsch was Finance Minister of Austria from 1970 to 1981 and served as Vice-Chancellor from 1976 to 1981. He is Commissioner-General of the Austrian Pavilion.

My first personal experience with China dates back to the year 1984. When I first visited your country as CEO of Creditanstalt, which was at that time the leading Austrian bank, I saw a totally different country. In the past 30 years, China's development has been tremendous. I had the chance to experience these fast changes during numerous visits to China, I truly admire the courage and wisdom of the Chinese leadership, supported by the diligence and eagerness to improve life shown by the Chinese people.

In the 21st century, the People's Republic of China came back to the world stage and regained the position which she had held for centuries. Given his historic dimension, it is just natural to me that China is hosting World EXPO 2010. I am confident that this EXPO will be a historic one, evidenced by the number of participating countries and visitors, the size of the Expo-area, the dedication by participating countries, international organizations and cities, and last but not least, the money which will be invested into the pavilions and projects.

Austria definitely considers World Expo Shanghai as the largest participation project in Austria's Expo history. We know that our participation is important for the further deepening of our historically excellent relationship with China, not only in the fields of economy but also in politics, culture and education. We consider EXPO Shanghai as a chance to further strengthen the ties of our friendship with China.

Austrian-Chinese relations have developed in a very positive way: After important milestones such as the founding of the first Austrian commercial section in Beijing in 1966 and the establishment

of diplomatic relations between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Austria in 1971, more than 370 Austrian companies today are represented in China. The People's Republic is Austria's most important trading partner in Asia and plays an important role as a supplier in the fields of electronics, textiles, leather goods and toys. In return the Chinese economy has a high demand for technical knowledge related to industrial plants and the automotive and mechanical engineering sectors. Seminal fields such as environmental technology, renewable energy and a reasonable handling of natural resources are full of potential and yet to a vast extent unutilized. Innovation and creativity have turned a small country like Austria into one of the world's leading nations in the field of environmental technology. While the Expo theme "Better City, Better Life" searches for answers and approaches to solve the most important global challenges of the 21st century, Austria can contribute with its most innovative knowledge in the fields of economy and science.

Exchange programmes as well as Austria's first bilateral academic agreement with a non-European country enable an increasing exchange of students and scientists in research and academic fields. Several sister city relationships between Chinese and Austrian regions and cities – such as the one between Shanghai and Mozart's hometown Salzburg - illustrate the friendship of our two countries.

The most recent demonstration of this very special relationship was exemplified by the visit of the Austrian Federal President Heinz Fischer in January. The Austrian head of state was welcomed in Beijing with full military honours and engaged in very positive talks with President Hu Jintao, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao and the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress Wu Bangguo. In Shanghai the Austrian Federal President ascertained the progress of the Austrian Pavilion at World Expo 2010. Together with the officials of the Expo Bureau he unveiled the name of the pavilion. The excellent reception of our country in China can be ascribed to Mr. Fischer's personal reputation in China as well as to his political relations to Prime Minister Wen, but at the same time it can be interpreted as a sign of appreciation of Austria's contribution on the international political stage, even being a small country, and of Austria's reputation as a reliable partner.

In addition to economic aspects, we would also like to focus on Austria as a holiday destination. We invite Chinese and international visitors to get to know a country where the people know how to live, where culture and nature are linked in an interesting sort of way, and where, finally, tradition is sophisticatedly combined with innovation. Apart from the excellent quality of living in Austria, with

its pure and healthy waters, unpolluted air and the diverse cultural landscape, the Austrian people's pleasure in enjoying their way of living and life itself offers the perfect basis for slowing down - as a kind of counter world to the hectic life experienced in Chinese megacities. Among 215 metropolitan areas, Austria's capital Vienna has just recently been rated the world's top city offering the best quality of life. Vienna scored best for a number of reasons, including infrastructure aspects like availability of public transport, electricity and water supply, but also the disposal of waste and waste water. It is these very fields where Vienna, as well as other Austrian cities, excels worldwide for their high-tech competency.

When World Exhibitions started in the 19th century, they were industrial exhibitions showcasing the latest developments. Great inventions such as the sewing-machine, the telephone and colour television made their debuts at World Expos in London, Paris, Vienna and New York. Nowadays, the meaning of World EXPO had changed: Our world has become an integrated global entity. The upcoming Expo in Shanghai is the first to take place amid the first signs of recovery after a truly global economic crisis. It represents the quest for a better form of economic organisation, for more intensive and more global cooperation, and a better-functioning financial environment.

So World Expos should give answers to questions of global importance and help to overcome challenges which the international community is facing. International cooperation and networking have become more and more important. We all are aware that the world has become a more interconnected, interdependent place. I am confident that Shanghai World Expo will be successful in fulfilling the role as platform for finding answers and ideas to solve those global challenges. In this way, China will accept the responsibility for global matters resulting from China's current role as a rising economic and political power, going hand-in-hand with its size and population.

I wish Shanghai World Expo 2010 a great historical success and hope that Austria's participation can contribute!