SOTSCHI DIALOGUE:

Intensifying Connections between Russian and Austrian Regions

Western Balkans: The European perspective must be a matter of the heart

Expert Conference: Airport Cities - Smart Regional Development

Europe-Forum Wachau: How to overcome defensiveness of the last years
Our Slovak republic has been part of the European community for fifteen years. It is a community of free and democratic countries. It is good fortune and a privilege that generations before us could only dream about. Throughout our history, we have many times fallen victim to superpower politics, we had been included in empires where decisions about us were made without us. Our EU membership is our free choice. A small state in the middle of Europe couldn’t encounter a better fate than to belong to a community that espouses economic prosperity with social solidarity and expects every member state to adhere to the principles of international law. The fact that we are a part of the union is not just a matter of our prosperity, it is also an important contribution to our national sovereignty.

The EU is the space where we live and whose values we share. As a country, we need to do all that is in our power to preserve and strengthen this space and its supporting pillars. It is important also because we cannot deal with the biggest global issues that concern us just on our own, using our own capacities. We can only make it within the framework of the broadest international cooperation. The EU can significantly contribute to that, because it is based on cooperation between states and on aligning national interests in favour of the common good.

Europe, with us as part, should become a long-standing leader in averting several global threats, including the threat of the climate crisis. The World Bank estimates that by 2050, if the trend does not change, climate changes might expel up to 143 million people from their homes. We need to slow down and reverse the process of global climate change, otherwise it might have serious consequences for Slovakia. We know that the solution of the global ecologic threat does not depend solely on us. Slovakia cannot solve the global climate crisis on its own but holds the protection of its own nature in its hands. This is an opportunity for all of us to be real patriots, regardless of our politics or our party preferences.

Slovakia is a diverse country. Geographically, nationally, culturally and socially. This relatively small territory is home to so much diversity, starting with nature, through to traditions, all the way to lifestyles – influenced by different life experiences; our parents, who remember the wars and the repressions of the communist regime, ourselves, who have experienced the euphoria of the end of totalitarianism and the tough period of nascent democracy; our children, who were born in a free country and who consider the freedom to travel as natural as was the relationship our parents had with the land and the soil. If we can respect these diversities in our families and we can wish each other well, we can also make it in society. Let us respect the wisdom and experiences of our seniors, but also the freedom and the lust to explore in our young people, and also, the culture and the creativity that belongs to this freedom of totalitarianism and the tough period of nascent democracy, our children, who were born in a free country and who consider the freedom to travel as natural as was the relationship our parents had with the land and the soil. If we can respect these diversities in our families and we can wish each other well, we can also make it in society. Let us respect the wisdom and experiences of our seniors, but also the freedom and the lust to explore in our young people, and also, the culture and the creativity that belongs to this freedom of totalitarianism and the tough period of nascent democracy, our children, who were born in a free country and who consider the freedom to travel as natural as was the relationship our parents had with the land and the soil. If we can respect these diversities in our families and we can wish each other well, we can also make it in society. Let us respect the wisdom and experiences of our seniors, but also the freedom and the lust to explore in our young people, and also, the culture and the creativity that belongs to this freedom of totalitarianism and the tough period of nascent democracy.

In the discussions, it became clear again what the key challenges of all countries of the Western Balkans are: democracy, the rule of law, legal certainty, politically independent justice, media freedom, functioning public administration, preparation for the Common Market, etc. Ignoring the decisions of the highest courts is rather unthinkable in Western Europe. However, there must also be confidence that the jurisdiction is politically independent. However, it should not be overlooked that there are some among the EU Member States who want to bring the jurisdiction under political influence again. There is corruption everywhere as well, but the question remains how to deal with it.

The use of EU financial support in the accession countries can lead to the strengthening of democracy and the rule of law if used properly - such as for training, know-how exchange, best practice media and government, strengthening the administration, learning democracy, training of young people.

European perspective for the Western Balkans must be a matter of the heart

On 18 and 19 June 2019, the members of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) discussed the current position of the Western Balkans on the road to the EU. IRE-Chairman and chairman of the Working Group on Western Balkans Franz Schausberger, emphasized that it could not only be about what the enlargement countries have to do, but also about what could be improved by the side of the European Union. This is necessary in terms of cooperation and communication at eye level.

In our region, we need to create an environment that enables the development of the young generation, including their freedom of opinion, the abilities to think, to critically analyze and to use their creativity. Let us not forget that our fellow humans that are at the core of respect for diversity.
The Stone Bridge across the Vardar River in Skopje.

Johannes Hahn, European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, emphasizes that a credible enlargement policy is a geostategic investment for the whole of Europe - for peace, stability, security and economic growth.

**There must be a perspective towards the European Union for all Balkan countries**

“The Western Balkans belongs to Europe and will be part of the future of the EU”, says EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini. Johannes Hahn also emphasizes that there must be an accession perspective for all six Balkan countries. A postponement of accession talks and the failure to acknowledge the progress made by these countries could have dramatic consequences for the region and for the credibility of the European Union.

In its report, the EU Commission sets milestones for necessary reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the end of May, the European Commission also presented its opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina’s application for membership of the European Union. The report reviews the situation in the country against all standards applicable to EU Member States.

The Republika Srpska and Austrian federal states are for better economic relations to support accession talks.

On May 22, Franz Schausberger met with the Prime Minister Radovan Viskovic of the Republika Srpska and his Energy Minister Petar Djokic and the Minister of Economy Vjekoslav Petricevic. The focus of the meeting was on the possibilites of intensifying economic relations between the Republika Srpska and the Austrian Federal States – as accompanying measures to the ongoing EU-accession talks.

Prime Minister Viskovic pointed out that after the last election in October 2018 in the Republika Srpska a government was formed immediately, thus creating the necessary stability for investors. It is regrettable that until today, neither at the level of the federation nor at the state level, a stable government could be formed. Important projects could only be implemented together with the state government.

Schausberger fears that due to the general government situation, the forthcoming progress report 2019 of the European Commission on Bosnia and Herzegovina will not turn out as positive as hoped.
The Institute of the Regions of Europe organizes a meeting of Russian governors with Austrian provincial governors on 7th October 2019.

IRE will organize a regional conference of the Sotschi-Dialogue in Salzburg

The meeting in Salzburg was agreed at the inaugural meeting in Sotschi on 15th May in the presence of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Austrian President Alexander Van der Bellen. Schausberger is a member of the Steering-Committee of the Sotschi-dialogue and said, this meeting is supposed open the possibilities of intensifying cooperation between the Russian regions and the Austrian federal states. The first of these meetings will be part of the IRE’s 15th Conference of European Regions and Cities and could become an annual fixture in the program of the Sotschi-dialogue. Franz Schausberger described it as an award that the IRE is entrusted with this task.

Focus on Regional Cooperation

It was also agreed that the annual general assembly of the Sotschi-dialogue would be held alternately in Sotschi and Salzburg. In 2020, the meeting will take place as part of the 100th anniversary of the Salzburg Festival in Salzburg.

Franz Schausberger visited the Tambov region before the constituent session of the Sotschi-dialogue. This was preceded by a visit of the governor of Tambov, Alexander Nikitin, to Governor Wilfried Haslauer on 26th March 2019 in Salzburg. Schausberger brought greetings and a gift from the Salzburg Governor and agreed to further talks about a possible cooperation in the areas of wood processing, agriculture and cultural tourism. Thus, the Tambov region has a very close relationship with the Russian composer, pianist and conductor Sergei Vasilievich Rachmaninoff (1873-1943). Every year the Rachmaninoff International Music Festival takes place there.

Intensify the dialogue with Russia - especially at the regional level

The Sotschi-Dialogue is an Austro-Russian forum and discussion platform for strengthening relations and civil society exchange. Joint events and projects are defined by the Steering-Committee with the Austrian and Russian Foreign Ministers. The main topics of the Sotschi-Dialogue are Music, Arts and Culture, University and Research, Economy and Sports. Joint events and projects on these topics are defined by the Steering Committee in consultation with the two foreign ministries. Projects are then financed on the Austrian side by the participating ministries, local authorities, institutions and organizations as well as selected sponsors.

The Sotschi-Dialogue was officially presented on the occasion of the visit of President Vladimir Putin to President Alexander Van der Bellen in Vienna in June 2018. The Joint Statement was signed on 12th March 2019 by the Foreign Minister Karin Kneissl and Sergei Lavrov in Moscow, and the constituent meeting of the Sotschi-Dialogue’s Steering Committee was held on 13th May 2019 as part of a visit by President Alexander Van der Bellen in Sotschi.

Members of the Austrian Steering Committee

Austrian Co-Chairman Dr. Christoph Leitl, Honorary President of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber
Dr. Helga Rabl-Stadler, President of the Salzburg Festival
Univ.-Prof. Dr. Franz Schausberger, Chairman of the Executive Board of the Institute of the Regions of Europe (IRE), former Governor of Land Salzburg
KR. Richard Schenz, President of the Austrian-Russian Friendship Society
Univ.-Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Brandstetter, Member of the Constitutional Court, former Austrian Vice-Chancellor
Dkm. Dr. Hannes Androsch, Chairman of the Supervisory Board of the Austrian Institute of Technology
Ing. Hubert Bertsch, Owner and Managing Partner of Bertsch Holding and Vice-President of the Federation of Austrian Industry
Karl-Heinz Kopf, Secretary-General of the Chamber of Commerce and Chairman of the Austrian-Russian Parliamentary Friendship Group
Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan Karner, Chairman of the Austrian-Russian Historical Commission
Dr. Sabine Haag, Director-General of the Kunsthistorisches Museum
Dr. Andreas Mallath-Pokorny, Rector of Music and Art Private University of the City of Vienna

Members of the Russian Steering Committee

Russian Co-Chairman Andrei Fursenko, Presidential Adviser and Former Minister of Education of the Russian Federation
Petr Aven, Chairman of the Supervisory Board AB NLM Holding S.A.
Viktor Blazheev, Rector of the Moscow State Law University
Mikhail Gusman, 1st deputy director-general of TASS news agency
Andrei Kuzyaev, Chairman of the Supervisory Board Perm Financial and Industrial Group
Marina Loshak, Director of Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts
Vladislav Panchenko, Chairman of the Supervisory Board of the Russian Foundation for Basic Research
Maria Petrova, Executive Secretary of the Russian-Austrian Historical Commission
Sergey Proskurin, Member of the Expert Council for International Partnerships of the Russian Youth Association
Sergei Roldugin, artistic director St. Petersburg House of Music
Andrei Rudskoi, Rector of the St. Petersburg Polytechnic University

Of course, the dialogue does not mean that you should be uncritical of Russia. But once the dialogue is over, everything else is over.

Franz Schausberger, Chairman of the IRE and member of the Steering Committee of the Sotschi Dialogue

Sotschi, guest complex Rus, in which the constituent meeting of the Sotschi-dialogue took place.

F.L.: The Governor of Tambov, Alexander Nikitin, and Franz Schausberger
European Entrepreneurial Region Award

The European Entrepreneurial Region (EER) label given by the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) rewards regions with the most credible and forward-looking entrepreneurial vision. This year the city of Gdańsk in cooperation with the Pomorskie Region, the Business Region of Gothenburg and the region of Navarra were selected as winners for their outstanding strategies and commitment to boosting entrepreneurship within their territories.

Since the launch of the EER initiative twenty-seven territories from fifteen EU countries have been awarded. All of them have already shown that regions and cities play a key role in boosting entrepreneurship and innovation and creating conditions for sustainable growth and jobs in the European Union”, said CoR First Vice President Markku Markkula on 27th of June.

The European Entrepreneurial Region (EER) award is a project that each year identifies and rewards three EU territories, which show an outstanding and innovative entrepreneurial policy strategy, irrespective of their size, wealth and competences. The territories with the most credible, forward-looking and promising plan are granted the label “European Entrepreneurial Region” (EER) for the following year.

Celebrating 25 years of the Lower Austrian Liaison Office in Brussels

A Partnership for the Future

“This is just an anniversary to celebrate”, says the Governor of Lower Austria, Johanna Mikl-Leitner. And so, on April 11, Lower Austria (a member of the IRE since 2005) celebrates the Liaison Office in Brussels with a large audience from Austria and other European member states. For 25 years the Liaison Office has represented the people of Lower Austria - in partnership with many other regions of Europe. Because the regional parliaments are an important element when building the future of Europe together. “The heartbeat of Europe must pulsate in the regions”, says Martin Eichtinger, member of the Government of Lower Austria for Europe and International Affairs and President of the “Europaforum Wachau”.

The Liaison Office has a major role in the coordination between the European institutions and the government of Lower Austria - and gains recognition across party lines. In the course of the celebration the governor Johanna Mikl-Leitner presented the ideas for the European cultural capital St. Pölten 2024 - to make the capital of Lower Austria a European rolemodel. The other Austrian applicant cities are Dornbirn and Bad Ischl.

Most important is to protect and secure European politics on regional level – to ensure the united European future.

Governor Johanna Mikl-Leitner and Franz Schausberger

The team of the Lower Austrian Liaison Office in Brussels gathered with prominent congratulants as Governor Johanna Mikl-Leitner (m.), the member of regional government Martin Eichtinger (m.L.) and MEP Lukas Mandl (2.f.L.),
European elections

High turnout in European elections

Around 400 million Europeans in the 28 Member States were called to vote for a new parliament in the European elections. 751 MEPs belong to the new European plenary.

The European Commission has considered the elections to the European Parliament as proof of a vibrant and functioning democracy in the European Union. The highest participation in 20 years has shown Europeans are committed to the future of the European Union. The average turnout is 50.63 percent.

“We have good reason to believe that this result reflects our hard work and performance over the past five years,” the spokesman of the Commission Margaritis Schinas said. Unlike the prophecies of the doom merchants, Schinas added, the political forces of the entire political spectrum would have won. The winners are those who wanted to work in and for Europe.

Sources: Turnout_by_country.png
Turnout_by_age.png
www.election-results.eu

Election of the mayor in Istanbul

Opposition wins Istanbul

In the election of the mayor in Istanbul, the Opposition leader won the election again.

The mayor of Istanbul is the most important local politician in the country. Around 16 million people - almost 20 percent of all Turks - live in the metropolis on the Bosporus. The importance of the region has clearly won the Opposition party CHP Ekrem İmamoğlu.

In the repetition of the mayoral election - the election commission had annulled the result due to irregularities - İmamoğlu is clearly beaten the AKP politician İmamoğlu. The candidate of the opposition party CHP and the Arabian Peninsula. The new MEP is a member of the delegation to the EFTA States with the European Court of Human Rights.

F.l.: David Dera, Consultant Messe München, IRE secretary Karoline Edtstadler

The IRE co-organized conference with the Democratic Forum of Germans in Brașov

Airports as growth engines for regional development

Under the patronage of the Institute of the Regions of Europe (IRE) and in partnership with the German-Romanian Chamber of Industry and Commerce (AHK), the conference “Smart Regional Development - Airport City” took place in Ghimbav (Romania) on 16th May 2019. Initiator of the event was the Kronstadt district council chairman, Christian Macendonchi (Democratic Forum of the Germans), who had invited many experts from domestic and foreign airports, specialists in the field of flight and politicians. Partners were also Advantage Austria in Romania and the airport association of the country.

The welcoming speech was held by the interim Mayor of Ghimbav, Ionel Fliundra. He emphasized the importance of this airport-project, which is to be built on Kronstadt’s district council’s own initiative and without significant government support. The runway already exists, one can count on commissioning 2021. The chairman of the Kronstadt district council, Adrian Vestea, on whose initiative an airport commission within the district council was founded, was optimistic. The district council has made the majority of the money available in its own household.

One of the most significant developments in Europe has been recorded at Munich Airport, where 50 million passengers a year are handled. Simon Lottes, one of the airport directors, emphasized that it does not make sense to build a large airport right from the start, but that, depending on the development, it will be expanded in stages. The representative of the airport of Linz, a city as big as Kronstadt, pointed out that the local airport is about the same distance from Bucharest as the one in Linz from Vienna - this one has its key area on cargo transport to serve as an example.

Siegfried Murean, Member of the European Parliament, emphasized that the project was of particular importance for the development of the metropolitan region and for public services for citizens. This also increases their confidence in the local administration. The fact that out of the 12 million tourists who came to Romania, 1.3 million are in the Kronstadt region. The airport does not only of European integration, but also new jobs. Christian Macedonchi welcomed the concept as a Smart City, emphasizing that besides the airport, an exhibition center had to be created hand in hand.

Source: Allgemeine Deutsche Zeitung für Rumänien.

18th May 2019.

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1.3 million are in the Kronstadt area. The airport does not only offer economic and tourism development, but also new jobs. Christian Macedonchi welcomed the concept as a Smart City, emphasizing that besides the airport, an exhibition center had to be created hand in hand.

Source: Allgemeine Deutsche Zeitung für Rumänien.

18th May 2019.

The candidate of the opposition party CHP had beaten the AKP politician Binali Yıldırım already in the first election, surprisingly, but only just with about 20,000 votes ahead.

In the repetition of the mayoral election - the election commission had annulled the result due to irregularities - İmamoğlu is clear with 53.8 percent of the votes before Yıldırım, who came to 45.3 percent. This time the gap between the two candidates is more than 740,000 votes.

No special occurrences reported the election observers from Istanbul. The Chairperson of the Council of Europe Observation Mission said that “all in all”, the election had been well ordered. Her statement said that “all in all”, the election had been well ordered. Her impression was that the heads of the election committees had the necessary tools for their work. “Organizational everything has been provided what one can do,” The Strasbourg-based Council of Europe monitors compliance with human rights in the 47 Member States with the European Court of Human Rights.

Thanks to Austrian longest serving MEP Paul Rübig

Paul Rübig was a Member of the European Parliament (EPP) for nearly 24 years and thus is the longest serving Austrian member. He was a member of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy and the Committee on Budgetary Control. As Vice Chairman, he is a member of the delegation to the Maghreb countries and is also involved in the delegations to the EFTA States and the Arabian Peninsula. The new MEP Karoline Edtstadler and IRE chairman Franz Schausberger thanked him in a small celebration for his great merits.
On 26 June 2019, the Prime Minister of Saxony-Anhalt, Reiner Haseloff, gave a reception at the re-presentation of his federal state in Brussels, in which also the Prime Minister of the German Community in Belgium, Oliver Paasch, and the former Governor of Salzburg and IRE Chairman Franz Schausberger participated.

The 100th anniversary of “Bauhaus” was the dominant theme at the summer meeting of the state re-presentation of Saxony-Anhalt in Brussels.

In 2019, Germany and its partners around the world celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Bauhaus as one of the most important cultural achievements of the 20th century. Founded in 1919 in Weimar, moved to Dessau in 1925, and finally closed in 1933 in Berlin under pressure from the National Socialists, the Hochschule für Gestaltung existed for a full 14 years. Nevertheless, the Bauhaus continues to operate worldwide right up to the present day.

Dessau is the city with which the Bauhaus is most strongly connected. Here, the university has experienced its heyday. All three Bauhaus directors Walter Gropius, Hannes Meyer and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe lived and worked here, and almost all Bauhaus buildings were built here.

For the anniversary year, a “Bauhaus Verbund 2019” was founded by the three states of Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia and Berlin. On September 8, 2019, the Bauhaus Museum in Dessau will be opened as the highlight of the 100-year Bauhaus anniversary. For the first time, the valuable collection of the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation, comprising some 49,000 exhibits, will be presented there.
The European energy system is undergoing a complete restructuring. Renewable energies are on the advance, and creation of a climate-friendly energy system requires a reliable power grid. International agreements calls for massive reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions in all consumer sectors. The Austrian contribution to reducing emissions is laid out in the Austrian Climate and Energy Strategy (#mission2030), which aims at covering 100% of total electricity consumption with renewable energies by 2030. Since the generation of electricity from wind and solar power is subject to major weather-based fluctuations, the electricity grid is a pivotal component in reaching this goal. By 2030, generation could fluctuate by as much as 2.4 gigawatts depending on the season of the year. That’s approximately equal to the output of all of Austria’s hydropower plants on the Danube. However, it’s vital that electricity generation and consumption be kept in balance every single second.

A strong power grid makes it possible

The energy transition depends on the electricity transmission grid. The grid distributes electricity within Austria and also transports electricity to and from Austria’s neighbours in Europe. This is the only way to effectively leverage the potential offered by renewable energies. To meet the energy needs of the future, the power grid will have to be in good shape – which means that substantial upgrades will be needed going forward as well. That’s why over the next ten years, APG will be investing more than EUR 2.5 billion in the Austrian electricity grid to provide the foundation for a secure and sustainable energy future.

In the service of Austrian security of supply

Austrian Power Grid AG (APG) is the only electricity transmission system operator (TSO) for Austria. APG has put together the best team in the energy sector to ensure that Austria has a secure and reliable source of power 24/7, 365 days a year. With a route length of 3,500 km, the APG grid infrastructure traverses all of Austria. A total of 480 APG specialists work to maintain the electricity grid and guarantee its safe operation. Along with managing the domestic power market and its integration with the rest of Europe, the APG team is planning the electricity grid of the future.

Internships at the IRE

Since 2005 the Institute of the Regions of Europe (IRE) has created the opportunity for young students to spend a month in the IRE – at the interface between science and European politics. They gain experience in regional policy, analyzing political events and the organization of international conferences.

Photocredits


Turkish Consul General on a working visit at the IRE

The topic of the working discussion on 28 May was how more intensive scientific, economic and cultural cooperation between Turkish and Austrian regions and cities can be obtained. The question of how to involve the younger people was also discussed.

Cooperation with Institute for Economic Sciences in Belgrade

On May 27, Snezana Filipovic visited the Institute of the Regions of Europe (IRE) to discuss with Franz Schausberger the possibilities of a long-term cooperation of the Institute for Economic Sciences in Belgrade with the IRE.

Snezana Filipovic, research associate at the Institute of Economics in Belgrade, Serbia, with Franz Schausberger
How to overcome defensiveness of the last years

24. Europe-Forum Wachau

„With the new orientation of the Europe-Forum Wachau, where the future of Europe was discussed within the framework of six salons in the regions of Lower Austria and where ideas, thoughts and suggestions are incorporated here, we want the participation of the citizens in the center,” said Governor Johanna Mikl-Leitner at the European Forum Wachau in Göttweig, Lower Austria.

Europe, which has been developing rapidly for a long time, has been hampered by challenges over the last decade: „Over the past ten years, we have all too often experienced a Europe of defensiveness. How can we make Europe fit for the future?” The last European election in this regard is a positive sign that Europe has a future.

„Strong member states and strong regions are in the self-interest of a strong and confident European Union. Europe can only be successful if it has strong regions, if the power comes from the regions,” said Mikl-Leitner.

Another important point is that Europe must conquer innovation and technology leadership and become the number one in research, innovation and technology. This requires more resources and regional cooperation in the common research and development policy.

If Europe finds answers to its challenges with reason and common sense and above all accelerates speed and makes faster decisions, then Europe will not only become economically stronger, but also more fit and competitive for the world of tomorrow.

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The State of Upper Austria and the Institute of the Regions of Europe (IRE) are planning a conference on digitization and broadband coverage.

Digitize the Region

At a meeting in Linz on May 22, Upper Austrian Governor Thomas Stelzer and IRE-Chairman Franz Schausberger jointly agreed to organize a conference on “Digitization and Broadband Supply” in early 2020. As Governor Stelzer emphasized, broadband is a central economic and competitive factor for the state government of Upper Austria. By 2022, broadband Internet coverage will also be a reality in rural areas thanks to subsidies. Providing high-speed Internet access to the population, businesses, organizations and educational institutions is becoming increasingly important for further development and related opportunities for the regions. In order to best support the Upper Austrian communities and companies on their way to fast Internet and above all to make use of the available funding, the Broadband Office of the state of Upper Austria was founded. IRE-Chairman Franz Schausberger emphasized the importance of cross-border regional cooperation across national and state borders in the development of broadband coverage, especially in border regions.

The Governor of Upper Austria, Thomas Stelzer, at the IRE Conference of European Regions and Cities 2017 in Salzburg

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I am looking very much forward welcoming you at this Conference in Salzburg.
Franz Schausberger, IRE President
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