

■ Reform-minded teaching

Mouhanad Khorchide was chosen to take over Germany's only Islamic theology professorship at the University of Münster, announced the Ministry for Science and Research in Düsseldorf in mid-February. Born in Lebanon to Palestinian parents, the 38-year-old has been living in Vienna since 1989 and has degrees in Islamic studies and sociology. Khorchide, who is currently a lecturer in Islamic education and also an imam at a small mosque in Vienna, was the university's top choice. His doctoral thesis in 2007 called for better training of Islam teachers in Austria, criticizing them for their lack of knowledge and for not being committed enough to democracy. Muslim associations in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia are currently being consulted with to see if Khorchide would be acceptable to their community. The university, which trains schoolteachers to give Islamic classes, decided to replace Muhammad Sven Kalisch, a German-born convert, after he wrote that there is no independent evidence that the Prophet Mohammed existed in the historical past as a single person, thus losing the trust of the Muslim community.

■ Munich: Europe's top subway

Munich's subway system is the fastest and most comfortable in all of Europe, according to a new study by Europe's largest automobile club, ADAC, which surveyed commuters and local representatives of 23 European cities. The five German cities surveyed – Munich, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Cologne and Leipzig – all placed in the top 10. Because of its S-bahn (suburban metro railway) problems, Berlin was not included in the study. Despite its steep fares, Munich was the only city to receive a "very good." Zagreb placed last due to having bus stops with only a sign and no further information in some cases, and tram lines which only move eight miles per hour in the city center, the report said.

■ More kids with single parents

In Germany, one out of every four children between the ages of 14 and 17 lives with a single parent or a non-married couple, a report presented last month by the Federal Statistical Office showed, based on information collected in 2008. In 1996, that figure was one out of six children; in 2002, results showed that one out of five children grew up in such families. The number of children being raised by single mothers increased by 42 percent between 1996 and 2008. For single fathers, the corresponding increase was only 13 percent. The number of children being raised by an unmarried couple increased by 56 percent during the 12-year period. Of the 3.4 million children in Germany, about 75 percent still grow up in traditional family structures.



■ No pictures, please

The end of Nefertiti's paparazzi: The world's most famous 3,500-year-old bust in Berlin's Neues Museum can no longer be photographed. Since visitors had ignored the previous restriction of only taking pictures without flash, the museum has now introduced a complete ban.

■ Freedom of name

It may be rare that politicians change their name especially while in office, but Federal Minister for Family Affairs Kristina Kähler, now Schröder, did just that last month when she got married. She is among the 80 percent of women who take on the last name of their husband compared to only 5 percent of men who take on the name of their wife. Women in Germany were first allowed to keep their own name by attaching it to their husband's name with a hyphen in 1957. From 1976 onward, those getting married could keep their own name. How far, however, the freedom of name choice can go has been plaguing constitutional judges over the past few years. In 2004, one could still take one's name by marriage into a new marriage, which had however sparked outrage among the nobility. Last spring, the courts decided that three and – in some cases four – hyphenated names was taking it a bit far.

■ Hitler revisited

The Institute of Contemporary History (IfZ) in Munich announced Feb. 3 that it plans to publish an annotated version of Adolf Hitler's autobiography "Mein Kampf" in 2015, which is when the copyright currently held by the Bavarian state expires. This would be the manifesto's first publication in Germany since 1945. The 800-page book is to serve as an educational tool for schools and universities. Hitler wrote "Mein Kampf" in 1924 and the work was first published in two volumes in 1925 and 1926. More than 10 million copies of the title were distributed in Nazi Germany. Several foreign language editions have been published throughout the world over the past decades.



When the Soviets drove BMWs

A museum in Eisenach highlights the history of German car-building | By Harald Franzen

There was Daimler in Stuttgart and Benz in Mannheim. And then there was Eisenach. The town might be known for being the birthplace of Johann Sebastian Bach and for Wartburg Castle. But Eisenach is also a place where industrial-scale car manufacturing began more than 100 years ago and continues to this day.

It started with an armament factory in 1896, one which produced horse-drawn cars, gun carriages and field kitchens for the imperial armed forces. And though the automobile was invented in Germany in 1885, it initially didn't catch on as much as it did in neighboring France. So in 1898, Heinrich Erhardt, the owner of the Vehicle Factory Eisenach, first started by obtaining a license to manufacture a French car design.

One of those first automobiles greets the visitor in the Automobile Welt Eisenach (Automobile World Eisenach), a museum that has assembled a small but beautiful collection of vehicles ranging from 1898 to the present day. "The automotive industry has been the biggest employer in this city from day one," says Klaus-Dieter Fiesinger, the director of the museum. "The majority of the region and its people have been shaped by the car industry."

For now, the museum is still fairly small. The main exhibition is housed in a loft-style space, wrapped in windows. It is located on the ground floor of an industrial building dating back to 1935, which once housed the administration of the car factory. The city purchased the space from the Treuhänder, the agency charged with privatizing East German public property after the fall of communism, and received a large

number of historic cars – some for free – along with engines and other materials.

Marking the 100-year anniversary of car manufacturing in Eisenach in 1998, the city decided to create a museum that not only displayed the old cars but put them into the context of their time. Also, numerous people have made donations or loaned their cars to the museum after it finally opened in 2005. As a result, it is filled with beautiful classic cars, some of which are as surprising and unique as the stories they tell.

Take the beautiful two-seater sports car and the company that built it here in Eisenach: BMW. Bavarian Motor Works was initially in the aircraft engine business, which explains their world-renowned white and blue logo: a white propeller blade before a blue sky. Despite the company's name, however, their BMW cars were not built in Bavaria but in Eisenach. BMW bought a share in an existing Eisenach-based carmaker and the BMW car was born. The first model was called "Dixie" and was another licensed design: a British Austin Seven.

But soon, BMW began to design its own cars. One of the most famous is the two-seater 1937 BMW 328. The car was not only beautiful but won numerous races including Le Mans and the Mille Miglia. The 328 was built until 1939 when production in Eisenach once again shifted toward equipment for war and the factory started producing off-road vehicles, emergency power generators and the legendary BMW R75 motorcycle with a sidecar for the military.

By the end of World War II, 60 percent of the factory was destroyed and ownership of the company had gone to the Soviet administration. Nonetheless, production of desperately needed goods like pots and handcars began again immediately. Only a few months later, however, production was shifted back to

the sought-after pre-war BMW models. Some of these prestigious cars were even shipped to the Soviet Union as reparations which resulted in the Soviet leadership driving very bourgeois cars.

The fact that the Soviets and later the East Germans continued to manufacture BMWs did not exactly please the folks at company headquarters in Munich, especially since BMW Eisenach was still selling cars in the West at the time. Eventually, BMW in Munich managed to force the carmakers from Eisenach to change their name. The result was a brand that somewhat resembled BMW but was distinguishable: EMW or Eisenach Motor Works.

Looking back

In the logo, the characteristic blue and white was replaced with red and white.

But car manufacturing was also an overall, philosophical predicament for the post-war socialist leadership in the German Democratic Republic: On the one hand, private vehicles were considered bourgeois and – even more – a waste of precious economic resources. On the other hand, modernizing the everyday lives of the East German population by giving them cars was a way to demonstrate the socialist system's superiority over the capitalist West.

And in the 1950s, East German cars could still easily compete with their West German counterparts in terms of technology. The museum's visitor gets a taste of that as he turns the corner and suddenly stares at a silver sliver of a car: It's a professional racecar from 1956. "The EMW team did not exactly make life easy for Porsche," Fiesinger explained. "Those were really serious competitors."

A century of automobile history is on display in Eisenach.

And not only on the racetracks. The Wartburg 311, the passenger car manufactured by the VEB (people-owned business) in Eisenach, was an elegantly designed, modern car, which sold well abroad, including in the West. That brought in much-needed hard currency. Several examples of Wartburg models from that golden age are on display at the museum including an elegant coupe and a camping-style station wagon.

But in later years, the GDR leadership decreed strategy changes that would eventually harm the Wartburg's chances in the international market such as the shift to a two-stroke engine. Innovations suggested by the engineers were often implemented much too slowly or not at all. Some of those later models that never saw the assembly line are on display as well.

Eventually, the cars were no longer competitive with Western designs. The Wartburg's end came shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall when East Germans could suddenly buy any car they wanted and they went for Volkswagens, Opels and other Western brands.

But the end of the Wartburg was not the end of car manufacturing in Eisenach. Once again, the city's car industry was reinvented when carmaker Opel opened a factory and began to manufacture its Vectra model there. The first car that rolled out of the new factory is the last car in the exhibition. "So far, this is only a small museum," said Fiesinger. "It is a foundation on which we will be building during the years to come."

Automobile Welt Eisenach
Friedrich-Naumann-Strasse 10,
99817 Eisenach, Tel. 03691-77212,
open Tue. to Sun. 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Adults: €5, students: €2, children €1.50,
guided tours can be arranged.

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