

## **STATEMENT**

**Prof. Dr. Franz X. Heinz**

**Institute of Virology, Medical University of Vienna**

### **Changing epidemiology of TBE and transmission by goat milk in Austria**

Previously Austria was among the European countries with the highest incidences of TBE. Today - with a vaccination coverage of 88 percent of the total population - the annual number of hospitalized cases has decreased to only 10 to 20 percent of that seen in the pre-vaccination era. Most of the cases seen are derived from the traditional endemic regions known for decades. However, almost every year some of the cases can be traced to new and previously unrecognized sites of infection, primarily in valleys of alpine regions. These observations would be compatible with environmental changes that facilitate the establishment of new natural foci in which TBE virus circulates.

In 2008, Austria experienced a remarkable example of a familial cluster of TBE cases transmitted by goat's milk cheese made at an alpine meadow in the federal state of Vorarlberg. Out of seven people who had consumed the same cheese, six were infected and four of them came down with clinically overt TBE. None of them was TBE vaccinated. The carefully conducted investigations confirmed that one of the goats was indeed infected with TBE virus and that this infection had occurred at an altitude of about 1500 m. Together with observations made in the Czech Republic this incidence suggests an expansion of TBE endemic areas to higher altitudes.