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**Europe's Fight against Tick-Borne Encephalitis –
An international Press Workshop from
The International Scientific Working Group on TBE**

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International TBE (tick borne encephalitis) experts met today in Vienna at the occasion of an international press workshop to declare the fight against TBE on a European basis. Still an increasing number of more than 10.000 new TBE patients every year is registered after the bite of an infected tick. But not only are the numbers of cases increasing every year (like in big countries like Germany or Czech Republic), so are the numbers of European travelers across Europe through the TBE endemic areas which are spread all over Eastern, Central and Western Europe already. Every year, over 60 million times, people from EU member states travel into TBE endemic countries. Since the latest extension of the EU borders the number of tourists from Western Europe and Germany traveling into these countries has substantially risen. With 365 Mio travellers in 2004, today Europe generates more than half of total international tourist arrivals, with as major source markets Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation, Belgium, Austria, Switzerland, Spain and the Nordic countries.

Based on estimated risk of TBE illness of 1/10.000 for a 4-week's stay in the TBE endemic province of Styria in Austria, the predicted number of travel-associated TBE cases was 6 per year over that county and 60 per year over the whole country of Austria.

"With tourism within Europe increasing, we still realize that there is an amazing ignorance and lack of awareness in the public in most European countries about the potential risks of TBE when travelling to endemic countries", so the expert Prof. Dr. Michael Kunze, Institute for Social Medicine, Vienna.

And every year new risk areas are detected. It can be assumed from this that TBE is still far too little known, too rarely diagnosed, and also not prevented to the degree which it would be possible to achieve. Therefore an efficient way of awareness raising to the population living in or traveling to endemic areas is key to banning TBE.

Unfortunately there is no causal treatment available for TBE affected patients, the only efficient prophylaxis is vaccination. The Austrian vaccination experience over the last more than 30 years has shown the success in reducing the high number of TBE cases from >700/year to less than 100 today. With regards to preventive programmes, it should be pointed out that inoculations basically exert their best effect if administered as early as possible (i.e. during childhood and adolescence). The success achieved in Austria with the containment of FSME is attributable not least to organized programmes (such as in schools). In most of the other European countries the vaccination rates are still only around 10% (in comparison with 87% in Austria).

The severity of the disease as well as the long-term sequelae are still not very much known in public. The symptoms of those affected can lead to meningitis, encephalitis or radiculomyelitis which may result in death or long-term neurological sequelae including permanent paralysis in 35-58% of all patients. Also children can be affected in a severe way. The encephalitic cases present with signs of involvement of the brain as ataxia, cognitive dysfunctions, dysphasia, altered consciousness, confusion, irritability, tremor and more rarely seizures and cranial nerve paralysis.

Therefore the ultimate goal of the European TBE experts is to increase public awareness about TBE and to increase the number of people vaccinated in order to prevent as many new cases as possible. For those 100.000s of people affected and suffering from the disease already, a new international patient platform will provide additional support and information and is supposed to become the first pan-European TBE network for those affected - following the successful example of the patient advocacy in Austria over the last more than 20 years. The new patient platform was successfully launched today, April the 25th (www.tick-victims.info) and will be available from the beginning - for intensive use for patients across Europe - in all European languages.