

EMBARGO UNTIL May 31, 2012, 08.00 CET

Klosterneuburg, May 31, 2012

## Two new professors to join IST Austria

**Plant biologists enhance research in the field of life sciences at IST • Two ERC grantees bring the number of IST professors to 24 • President Henzinger: „Signal for enduring attraction of IST Austria“**

Today, President Thomas Henzinger announced the appointment of two further faculty members of IST Austria. Eva Benková and Jiří Friml join the Institute as the first plant biologists, extending the scope of biological research at the Institute of Science and Technology (IST) Austria. Both will start their work on the IST campus towards the end of 2012, after the completion of the second laboratory building, Benková as Assistant Professor and Friml as Professor. With Benková and Körber laureate Friml IST Austria raises the number of ERC grantees at the institute to 10 out of 24 researchers.

President Henzinger expressed his delight: “I am very pleased that these two outstanding scientists have decided to join IST Austria at this important phase of its development. Their field of research will be an excellent enhancement to our existing strengths in the life sciences. As ERC grantees they have performed science at a truly excellent level. With their origins in the Czech Republic and in Slovakia they also represent the exceptional potential of Central European science and the strong ties that IST Austria has developed with this region.”

**Eva Benková** studied Molecular Biology and Genetics at Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic. Benková earned her PhD in Biophysics at the Institute of Biophysics of the Academy of Science of the Czech Republic in 1998. After three years as Postdoctoral fellow at the Max-Planck Institute for Plant Breeding in Cologne, Germany, Benková joined the Centre for Plant Molecular Biology in Tübingen. Since 2007, Benková holds a group leader position at the Plant Systems Biology Department, Flanders Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) in Gent, Belgium. In 2007, Benková was awarded an ERC Starting Grant for her work on plant hormonal crosstalk.

Eva Benková focuses on plant hormone research, using *Arabidopsis* root development as a model system. Her research attempts to unravel the molecular and cellular mechanisms underlying signaling networks in plants, with a special emphasis on the crosstalk between hormone signaling pathways. In recent years, Eva Benková has carried out screens to identify mutants impaired in hormone signaling in root development. In future, her research will use these mutants and molecular, genetic and theoretical approaches to unravel the still unknown mechanisms behind plant hormonal crosstalk. Her research will aim to reveal more general mechanisms behind the coordination of developmental programs not only in plants, but also in other biological systems.

**Jiří Friml** received his M.Sc. in Biochemistry from Masaryk University in 1997. Afterwards, he performed his doctoral studies in Biology at the Max Planck Institute for Plant Breeding in Cologne, Germany, and obtained his PhD from University of Cologne in 2000. He received a second PhD in Biochemistry from Masaryk University in 2002. In 2002, Jiří Friml became an independent research group leader at the Centre for Plant Molecular Biology at University of Tübingen. In 2006, Friml was conferred a full Professorship at the Plant Cell Biology Department at the University of Göttingen. Jiří Friml joined the Flanders Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) in Gent, Belgium, as full professor in 2007. In 2011, he received an ERC Starting Grant supporting his research in polarity and subcellular dynamics in plants. Friml was awarded the Körber European Science Award in 2010, and elected EMBO member in 2010 and AAAS fellow in 2011. The Körber European Science Prize honors outstanding and excellent scientists working in Europe and is regarded as one of the most significant European science awards.

Jiří Friml studies signal integration during plant development. Using a combination of genetics and high-resolution microscopy, he investigates how the integration of external signals, such as light or gravity, with cell polarity and intracellular trafficking translates into the development of the plant. In his research, Friml seeks to uncover the cellular and molecular mechanisms providing plant development with its unique abilities to adapt. His interdisciplinary research program is positioned at the intersection of molecular physiology, cell and developmental biology as well as evolutionary biology.

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## **IST Austria**

The Institute of Science and Technology (IST Austria) is a PhD granting research institution located in Klosterneuburg, 18 km from the center of Vienna, Austria. Inaugurated in 2009, the Institute is dedicated to basic research in the natural and mathematical sciences. The Institute employs professors on a tenure-track system; postdoctoral fellows; and doctoral students at its international graduate school. While dedicated to the principle of curiosity-driven research, the Institute owns the rights to all scientific discoveries and is committed to promote their use. The first president of IST Austria is Thomas A. Henzinger, a leading computer scientist and former professor of the University of California, Berkeley, and the EPFL in Lausanne, Switzerland.