

EMBARGO UNTIL MAY 25, 2011, 09.00 am

Klosterneuburg, May 25, 2011

High-ranking evaluation committee gives IST Austria excellent grade

An international committee composed of leading scientists – including two Nobel laureates – evaluated the Institute of Science and Technology Austria (IST Austria) in January 2011. The main result: the committee praises the establishment and successful start of IST Austria. The panel recommends extending the funding of the institute until 2021 in order to consolidate its place among the world-class institutions for basic research.

On January 24 and 25 a high-ranking panel of six international scientists visited the campus of IST Austria in Klosterneuburg in order to evaluate - as demanded by law - the development of the young institute, which was founded in 2006.

The evaluation committee was chaired by Prof. **David Baltimore**, Nobel Laureate (Medicine 1975) and former President of two of the world's leading research institutions: the California Institute of Technology (Caltech) and the Rockefeller University in New York. The other members of the panel were Prof. **Jonathan Dorfman**, a former director of the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center (SLAC) and President Elect of the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology; Prof. **Erwin Neher**, Nobel Laureate (Medicine 1991) and Max-Planck Director; Prof. **Linda Partridge**, University College London and Max-Planck Director; Prof. **Moshe Vardi** of Rice University; and Prof. **Manfred Morari** of ETH Zurich.

The Austrian Federal Minister for Science and Research, Dr. **Karlheinz Töchterle**, expressed his gratitude: "We are pleased that such a prestigious committee has agreed to take a close look at the first years of IST Austria. Their report confirms that we are on track to create in Austria a research institution that competes with the best in the world and to strengthen Austria's position in science and research." Töchterle continued: "Within a very short period IST Austria has established itself as a model institution with eminent importance for Austria. We will take the committee's recommendations very seriously in order to guarantee the successful continuation of the work accomplished so far." Governor Dr. **Erwin Pröll**: "I thank the panel for its thorough investigation and its detailed evaluation. Their report shows that Klosterneuburg - and Lower Austria – is well on the way to become a world-renowned location for basic science."

The recently submitted report of the evaluation team describes the establishment of IST Austria as a bold, visionary move by the Austrian government and attests the young institute a remarkably rapid and successful launch: "In summary, over a period of about two years IST managed to identify and attract an amazing group of almost twenty faculty members that would be the pride of any top university in the world." According to the committee, IST is a unique institution in Austria, well-positioned to accomplish its mission to attain a world-class reputation. The committee names the doctoral school as one of the main strengths of IST Austria. It also praises the tenure-track system for scientists, the excellent research conditions, and the interdisciplinary focus of the institute.

The evaluation committee gives particular attention to the issue of budget. The panel views continued long-term funding of IST Austria as necessary for securing the remarkable recent achievements and for establishing the institute firmly within the international scientific community: "The trajectory of development of all of the elements of this institution is toward making an organization of clear excellence that will be recognized throughout the world, but continued governmental support is a necessary condition."

The committee specifically recommends a prolonged funding period until at least 2021 in order to allow a 10-year planning horizon for the institute. The current funding of IST Austria will terminate in 2016. The recommended extension until 2021 is essential both for constructing necessary laboratory buildings and in order to attract top scientists.

The committee recommends that IST Austria be allowed to grow at an annual rate of 10% from 2017 till 2021, in order to reach a medium-term target of approximately 100 research groups. IST President **Thomas Henzinger**: "I know from many recruiting negotiations that securing funding for at least 10 years is vital in order to compete successfully with top institutions worldwide."

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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.