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## ERA-NET PathoGenoMics Announces Winners of the Ph.D. Award for 2010

PÉCS, Hungary--([BUSINESS WIRE](#))--ERA-NET PathoGenoMics, an initiative of the European Commission aimed at advancing transnational genome-based research programs on human-pathogenic microorganisms, announced today the winners of the Ph.D. Award 2010 for the most outstanding Ph.D. theses in this field. The three winners, awarded 2000 € each, are Dr. Itay Tirosh from the Weizmann Institute of Science, Rehovot, Israel, Dr. Andreja Kovač from University of Ljubljana, Slovenia and Dr. Cristina Latasa from the Public University of Navarra, Spain. The award ceremony took place at the joint meeting of ERA-NET PathoGenoMics and network of excellence EuroPathogenomics held in Pécs, Hungary.

"This year we evaluated 8 candidate theses, recommended by the ERA-NET partners, all of which presented high quality and innovative science. The winners were chosen based on excellence in scientific quality and impact of the work, quality of publications and the theoretical approach underlying the research," said Dr. Marion Karrasch-Bott, Coordinator of ERA-NET PathoGenoMics.

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### About Pathogenomics

Pathogen infections are among the leading causes for disease and mortality throughout the globe. As more pathogenic strains develop resistance to existing drugs, the race for finding novel anti-bacterial and anti-fungal drugs becomes ever more urgent. The field of pathogenomics utilizes data acquired by genomics and related methods in order to better characterize pathogenic bacteria and fungi, interactions between different strains, and interactions between the pathogen and the human host. Pathogenomics has already been invaluable in understanding pathogenic evolution and diversity, in characterizing novel virulence factors, and in paving the way towards designing new diagnostic tests and drugs that will help keep humankind abreast of ever-changing pathogens.

### About the Chosen Ph.D. Theses

Itay Tirosh received the award for elucidating the evolution of gene expression regulation on a genome-wide scale. Deciphering the mechanisms underlying the phenotypic variation among different species is crucial to our understanding of evolution. For decades, scientists have primarily focused on mutations that change the protein-coding part of genes as the main driver of phenotypic variation. However, we now realize that organisms are not merely defined by their ensemble of genes, but also by how these genes are regulated, and gene regulation is a major source of variation between species. Dr. Tirosh studied and compared the genetic regulatory programs of different yeast species, and showed that the expression regulation of some genes undergoes an accelerated evolution, thus enabling a more rapid divergence of species.

Andreja Kovač received the award for discovering compounds that could serve as novel antibiotic drugs. By using computational methods followed by biochemical analysis, Dr. Kovač identified novel inhibitors of enzymes involved in biosynthesis of the bacterial cell wall. Some of the inhibitors already showed promising antibacterial activities. Dr. Kovač's work is an important part of the never ending battle against emerging multidrug resistant (MDR) strains of pathogenic bacteria – one of the serious medical threats in modern healthcare.

Cristina Latasa received the award for studying biofilm formation in *Salmonella*, the pathogen responsible for the foodborne illness salmonellosis. A biofilm is an aggregate of microorganisms in which cells adhere to each other and/or to a surface. The creation of biofilm helps bacteria resist external threats such as antibiotics and sanitizers. In the case of *Salmonella*, biofilm also contributes to effective infection of vegetables and industrial facilities. Dr. Latasa characterized a new protein involved in *Salmonella* biofilm formation and host colonization, as well as pointed to a biochemical pathway that can be perturbed in order to prevent biofilm formation. Biofilms have been found to be involved in a wide variety of microbial infections in the body, and understanding the process of biofilm formation and ways to disrupt it are crucial for developing efficient antimicrobial drugs.

### About ERA-NET PathoGenoMics

ERA-NET PathoGenoMics, an initiative funded by the European Commission, has been set up to establish sustained co-operation between national funding bodies and to co-ordinate their genome-based research programs on human-pathogenic microorganisms. Headed by Dr. Marion Karrasch from Juelich, Germany, the participating ERA-NET PathoGenoMics partner countries and funding institutions include: Austria, Federal Ministry for Science and Research (BMWF) and The Austrian Science Fund (FWF); Finland, Academy of Finland (AKA); France, Institut Pasteur (IP), and The National Agency for Research (ANR); Germany, Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and Project Management Juelich (PTJ); Hungary, Hungarian Academy of Science (HAS) and Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (OTKA); Israel, The Chief Scientist Office, Israeli Ministry of Health (CSO-MOH); Portugal, The Science and Technology Foundation (FCT); Slovenia, Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology (MHEST); Spain, Ministry of Science and Innovation. For further information, please visit [www.pathogenomics-era.net](http://www.pathogenomics-era.net).

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