



# 9<sup>th</sup> EUROPEAN CONGRESS OF VIROLOGY 2025

ECV 2025

27–30 APRIL 2025 | Dubrovnik (Croatia)



Interview Questions | 9<sup>th</sup> European Congress of Virology

## From basic research to pandemic prevention: Europe's virologists meet in Croatia

The European Congress of Virology 2025 (ECV2025) in Cavtat, Croatia, promises to be a stimulating exchange of the latest developments and insights in the broad field of virology. In advance of the conference, the congress chair, Professor Stipan Jonjic, spoke about the main objectives of this year's meeting, the importance of research in virology and the global challenges for scientists. A special highlight will be the live recording of the popular podcast 'This Week in Virology (TWiV)', which complements the diverse programme of the congress.

### What are the main objectives of this year's European Virology Congress?

**Jonjic:** The ECV2025 aims to address various aspects of virology, including basic virology, pathogenesis, immunology, public health aspects, development of novel diagnostic and research tools, etc. The primary mission of any congress is the exchange of knowledge and latest discoveries as well as the establishment of contacts that often result in new scientific collaborations. We certainly expect discussions on issues such as emerging viral infections, pandemics, and new aspects of prevention and therapy of viral infections. We open the congress with a keynote lecture by Professor Rino Rappuoli, focusing on the prevention and treatment of emerging viral threats. For early-career researchers, especially PhD students, the congress offers a valuable opportunity for education, networking, and connecting with experienced scientists — and potentially exploring options for future training in other laboratories.

**What new advances in the immune defence against MCMV will be presented at this Congress? The Center for Proteomics in Rijeka has been conducting intensive research on this virus, which serves as an important model for human cytomegalovirus (HCMV), for years.**

**Jonjic:** A number of virologists and viral immunologists, including our team from Croatia, will present their findings related to experimental research on murine cytomegalovirus (MCMV). Their presentations will cover topics ranging from the pathogenesis of infection in various tissues and organs to the immune response during latent infection. It is difficult to highlight one single contribution or participant, but for example, our colleagues from Rijeka will share their latest research on immunosubversive mechanisms that simultaneously target components of innate and adaptive immunity. They will also present new insights into the pathogenesis of CMV infection in the central nervous system, including the role of microglial cells in controlling and monitoring latent infection.

### Conference President

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### Hosting Society

European Society for Virology e.V.

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## **What impact has the U.S. withdrawal from international health organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) had on global virological research and pandemic preparedness?**

Jonjic: It's a sad story because I don't think there's any need to question the importance of the WHO. A globalized world with intensive international travel and a globalized economy requires coordinated, global actions against infectious diseases. That was one of the main messages of the recent COVID-19 pandemic. One can only hope that the US will reconsider its decision and rejoin the WHO framework because without the US's involvement, the WHO is definitely not the same.

## **How can the international community repair the damage done to virological research and public health by the Trump administration?**

Jonjic: As for research in virology, it is difficult to forecast the areas and levels of possible harm at this point. There is no need to reiterate the crucial role that U.S. science, including virology, plays in advancing global scientific progress. We can only hope that recent policy shifts instigated by the new administration, particularly regarding support for science and universities, will not have a lasting negative effect. As for international scientific cooperation, it remains to be seen how much these changes will really affect global trends in science, including virology and related disciplines.

## **In light of this, how would you rate the importance of the conference for the European virology community?**

Jonjic: Science thrives on the constant exchange of ideas, and conferences are the best place for that. The circulation of scientists between Europe and the US has had and continues to have great significance for both sides. However, since much more significant investments are being announced by the EU and other European countries in the sphere of defence, this could mean less investment in science, but that is just my speculation. We do not have a dedicated topic at the congress that would deal with this issue, but there is no doubt that such questions will arise in the discussions among the participants.

## **Which topics in virology will, in your opinion, become more important in the coming years?**

Jonjic: The prevention of emerging viral infections in humans and animals through new generations of vaccines and the development of new therapeutics for viral diseases have been and remain a priority. The development of new high-throughput technologies and new tools offered by AI will certainly accelerate these processes. However, meaningful progress will only be possible if these advances are supported by substantial investment in both basic and translational research.

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## How do you rate the use of AI in virus research and diagnostics?

Jonjic: AI is rapidly advancing and is offering new opportunities that were unimaginable only a few years ago. I see AI as a very important factor in managing high-throughput data and in predicting and engineering novel therapeutics. But I am sure we will continue to be surprised by what comes out next. However, AI is not an island nor a shoe that fits every foot and should be supported by real wet-lab work.

## How did the decision come about to record the podcast 'This Week in Virology (TWiV)' live at the conference?

Jonjic: This idea was born during a meeting of the Scientific Committee of our congress, which is not unusual considering that the podcast 'This Week in Virology' is very popular among virologists and has a broad audience beyond the field as well.

## What topics are likely to be covered in the podcast?

Jonjic: ECV2025 covers a wide range of topics, which were discussed with the TWiV team led by Professor Vincent Racaniello. Having said that, the final selection of podcast guests and topics is entirely in the hands of the TWiV team, and as such will remain a surprise not only for the participants, but also for the organizers of ECV2025. We are all looking forward to seeing and hearing who will be invited to TWiV - and which topics will be highlighted.

## How do you rate the role of science podcasts in general for public education in virology?

Jonjic: Personally, I really enjoy science and science popularization podcasts. These audio programs are not only very informative and relevant, but also represent a very convenient way to consume virology-related content, particularly for people with very busy lifestyles. The ability to acquire new knowledge while being on the move, or engaged in other activities, makes such programs attractive and accessible to a very wide audience, an important factor in improving public outreach and enhancing the public awareness about the importance of research in virology.

## What are the highlights of the conference for you? What are you particularly looking forward to?

Jonjic: Due to the nature of the event, most of the presentations at the congress are anticipated to be novel, thus bringing an element of surprise to the event. For example, in recent years, we have learned a lot about the role of some viral infections in the pathogenesis of diseases such as neurodegenerative diseases. At the congress we will have lectures and presentations on such topics. On the other hand, viruses are often referred to as "the best cell biologists," and the messages we

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get from basic virological research often have broader implications. Likewise, viruses can serve as vaccines and vaccine vectors, so let's say this is also one of the questions that interests us. Finally, I am delighted and honoured to be able to host so many fantastic virologists in my home-country, in such a beautiful place such as Cavtat.

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