ETH Zurich has considered it proper to make public the initiation of a dismissal procedure against Prof. Carollo. Since there is only one female professor in the field of astronomy at ETH, it is immediately obvious who the media release concerns. The ETH media release is therefore a personal injury. Prof. Carollo therefore feels compelled to correct the false impression that has been created by the ETH media release.

Prof. Carollo states the following:

Prof. Carollo has been the victim of a vengeful graduate student, but also of the power struggle that has been waged between Ombudsperson van Gunsteren and President Guzzella on the one hand and between the Department of Physics and Guzzella on the other hand. The ETH Board became a vehicle in this argument.

Prof. Carollo has worked and researched without recorded complaints against her since her appointment in 2002 until the end of 2016. She is one of the world’s leading observational astronomers. It was also thanks to her that the Institute of Astronomy enjoyed an excellent reputation before being destroyed on the initiative of the Physics Department.

Prof. Carollo was the victim of a group of employees in January and February 2017, who submitted a number of secret testimonials. These actions were triggered by a doctoral student, whose work Prof. Carollo was not satisfied with. The driving force behind these complaints was also the then ETH Ombudsperson van Gunsteren. The testimonials were widely disseminated within the ETH University Management and in the Department of Physics, and kept secret only from Prof. Carollo herself.

Prof. Carollo was not told the details of the accusations, nor who had made them. In March 2017, the ETH President ordered that Prof. Carollo receive coaching and that she have co-supervision of future doctoral students. These measures satisfied neither the Ombudsperson van Gunsteren nor the Department of Physics. In May 2017, the Department of Physics advocated the closure of the Institute for Astronomy.

At the same time van Gunsteren wrote a letter to President Guzzella in which he demanded the dismissal of Prof. Carollo, and in the process also recommended that there was no need to clarify the facts of the case. He wrote (in German):

"The Ombudspersons believe that it makes little sense to try to establish whether or not all the facts and events mentioned in the various documents are true or not, because in retrospect this can no longer be clearly established. This is unpleasant, but not problematic."

In the second half of the year, Prof. Carollo took a sabbatical, which also displeased both the Department of Physics and van Gunsteren. Van Gunsteren again made a demand for dismissal to the ETH Board. The ETH President wrote however on August 21, 2017 that:

“A dismissal procedure with the corresponding possibilities of appeal can only be initiated with a chance of enforceability if there are repeated
incidents which are either very serious or documented in the personnel files. As stated in section 6.1, MC’s personal dossier after 15 years of activity at the ETH Zurich - with the exception of the two cases this year - contains no previous entries or references.”

van Gunsteren finally achieved that the ETH Board ordered the ETH to carry out an Administrative Investigation.

The gathering of evidence in this Investigation was set up without any participation of Prof. Carollo. Prof. Carollo was not given the possibility to be present at the interviews and to ask questions of the interviewees. Only the result of the investigation was communicated to her. The investigation consisted in the employees voicing their complaints, but these complaints were not then examined for their truthfulness or credibility.

Prof. Carollo has contradicted the statements of these employees with a position paper of 90 pages with many additional supporting documents. This submitted documentation was not taken into consideration and none of her requests for additional investigations, which could have established the facts in the case, were accepted. We therefore assume that the ETH did not wish to establish facts with this Investigation.

The Final Report states:
“Of course, it is difficult to judge if everything has happened exactly as it has been said, as much has only happened in private. Overall, the information collected is [...] valid and the interviewed persons credible.”

This is, in other words, exactly what van Gunsteren wrote to the ETH Board a year and a half earlier. The Administrative Investigation has thus not resulted in a clarification of the facts of the case, which should have been its central task. On August 21, 2017, the ETH President was of the opinion that Prof. Carollo should not be dismissed. Since then, she has not worked at ETH Zurich, so it is not clear how this question can be answered differently today than it was in August 2017.

It is also noteworthy that there are other cases, in which students and employees have filed far more serious complaints against (male) professors, but in which the ETH has not found it appropriate to take even remotely comparable measures.

The investigation into scientific misconduct was already suggested by Prof. Carollo in March 2017, to clear her name, but was denied at that time. Prof. Plattner, the so-called Confidant, wrote a report on 17 December 2017. The commission appointed for this purpose, which alone is entitled to investigate the facts and whose task should have been a quick clarification of the situation, has to date delivered no results and a first interview with Prof. Carollos is scheduled only for the end of November.
Prof. Carollo will use all means at her disposal to defend against a dismissal that is based on such an insufficient and one-sided basis of fact.

Zurich, October 31, 2018