



Marcella Carollo – unfairly treated or an intransigent troublemaker?

Power and Impotence

ETH Zürich is seeking to dismiss astronomy professor Marcella Carollo. She has been accused of workplace harassment, but the allegations have never been substantiated. The case has now been made public. Then-ETH President Lino Guzzella handled the case so poorly that he had been in danger of not being selected for a second term. The ETH case, part 2.

By Silvan Aeschlimann, [Dennis Bühler](#), Dominik Osswald (Text), [Dominic Nahr](#) (Photos), Charles Hawley and Daryl Lindsey (Translation), 28.03.2019

The ETH has demanded a counterstatement («Gegendarstellung»). It is situated at the bottom of this article.

The Story So Far

Ph.D. student Elisabetta Marignano was under the supervision of Marcella Carollo. In early 2017, Marignano accused her supervisor of harassment and got in touch with ETH's ombudsman. While Marignano felt Carollo wasn't providing her adequate support, the astronomy professor thought her doctoral student was in over her head with the subject matter. The conflict es-

calated as more men from ETH leadership ranks joined in. None of them adhered to the conflict resolution process prescribed by the university. As such, the Carollo case ultimately transformed into the ETH case after an internal power struggle broke out.

Act Three: The President Falls into Ruin

Rainer Wallny is interested in the big questions. A man with a round face and gray hair, his research focuses on what holds the world together at its core.

As a university student, the German national had a hard time choosing his major, so he ended up taking classes in such wide-ranging subjects as German literature, philosophy and physics. Since 2010, he has held a full professorship in particle physics at ETH Zürich and has also served as deputy head of the Department of Physics since 2015. Because his direct superior, department head Simon Lilly, is married to Marcella Carollo, she reported to Wallny. Which meant that the 47-year-old Wallny was responsible for a heap of problems.

On May 4, 2017, six months after the dispute between Professor Carollo and doctoral student Elisabetta Marignano (whose name has been changed for this story) had escalated, Wallny headed up a delegation that arrived at 7 a.m. at the main university building, office F 50.3, for a meeting with ETH President Lino Guzzella and Vice President Ulrich Weidmann.

The Carollo affair had been the source of conflict for months in the Department of Physics. Which is why, Wallny felt, something needed to change. That, at least, was his goal, according to the documents. In his view, taking away all of Carollo's doctoral students and requiring her to participate in coaching sessions didn't go far enough. To defuse the situation, he felt it would be better to reorganize the department in a way that isolated Carollo and her husband.

At the time, there were only three full professorships at the Institute for Astronomy: Those held by Carollo and Lilly, and a third occupied by Alexandre Refregier, who had taken over as supervisor of Carollo's doctoral students two months earlier.

Since that time, the then-48-year-old French astronomer Refregier had begun registering a hostile atmosphere at the institute. Which is why Rainer Wallny wanted to restructure things. But it also gave him the opportunity to remove what was essentially a legacy problem: The double appointment of a married couple at the same institute would no longer be compliant with today's rules. The «Guidelines on the Employment of Spouses, Partners and Relatives at ETH Zürich» have been in force since 2013. To prevent conflicts of interest, professors who are couples are required to work in different departments.

Wallny had discussed a possible reorganization with Vice President Ulrich Weidmann in advance. The two had prepared a table in which they added their comments on all the possible repostings of Carollo and Lilly as well as Refregier.

- A new posting for Carollo? Difficult – no other institute would accept her («toxic export»)
- Another post for Refregier? Unfair – «would look like punishment»

- Break up the Lilly and Carollo team at the Institute for Astronomy? That would be possible – even though in Lilly’s case it would lead to the «weakening of a researcher who is very strong internationally».

The proposal made by Wallny to President Guzzella was about as simple as could be – and it would benefit Wallny himself above all. He suggested transferring Refregier to his own institute, which was to be rechristened as the «Institute for Particle Physics and Astrophysics». He also proposed dissolving the Institute for Astronomy and appointing Carollo and Lilly as independent professors, who would then work outside the hierarchy of the Physics Department. Without affiliation with an institute, Lilly would have to step down as department head, which would also solve the problem of bias toward his wife.

A stroke of genius.

It only took an hour for Wallny’s plan to be passed on the morning of May 4, 2017. Carollo and Lilly would be marginalized. And the Institute for Astronomy, which the couple had spent a decade and a half building up, and in which around 40 million Swiss francs had been invested, was to be eliminated.

Lilly’s successor as department head was to be found by a search committee headed by Wallny. A few months later, Wallny was selected to take the top job.

The particle physicist left questions from Republik about his motives unanswered.

The third act was underway.

It was another crucial moment in the chronology of the Carollo affair. The institutional measures taken implied that the allegations against Professor Carollo were true. Which they may be, but they hadn’t yet been investigated. Carollo still hadn’t been granted the right to tell her side of the story.

«Not Nice, But Not Problematic»

ETH President Guzzella believed he would have the Carollo case resolved within a month. But a letter from ombudsman Wilfred van Gunsteren upped the ante. He called on Guzzella to dismiss Carollo, stating that she showed «no doubts about her own approach and understanding of her role». The basis for his conclusion had been Carollo’s written response to the summaries of the testimonials. Carollo had written the letter to defend herself, but the ombudsman viewed it as proof of her intransigence.

The fact that the testimonials still hadn’t been reviewed to confirm their veracity didn’t matter, van Gunsteren wrote. «The ombudspersons believe it makes little sense to try to verify whether all the facts and events mentioned in the various documents are correct or not, because such proof cannot be clearly established after the fact. That’s unfortunate, but not problematic.»

Van Gunsteren’s conclusion: «The ombudspersons are of the opinion that Carollo’s retention as a professor at ETH Zürich constitutes a violation of decency and ethics and that this would cause more harm to the Institute for Astronomy, the Department of Physics and ETH Zürich than dismissal.»

With that, the ombudsman had broken a taboo: It’s not the ombudsman’s job to demand a dismissal. In accordance with the code of ethics of the International Ombudsman Association, they must always act neutrally, independently, in strict confidence and as an informal resource.

ETH Zürich managed for 164 years to avoid firing a professor. In order to guarantee complete freedom for the professors, the hurdles for dismissal had been set deliberately high: The offense must be serious, the professor must have been warned in writing at least once in the event of proven misconduct and must also have been given the opportunity to improve.

Even in instances where school management considers all these points to have been fulfilled, that still isn't enough. A dismissal commission must be appointed first to determine whether a termination is appropriate.

But Carollo's personnel file didn't even contain records of a single misstep. All that existed were the unsubstantiated accusations in the testimonials.

In those testimonials, doctoral students claim they had been harassed by the astronomy professor, that Carollo had excessive expectations for their availability and that she kept them in unproductive meetings until late into the night. Among themselves, they spoke of slave-like circumstances. Ph.D. student Elisabetta Marignano wrote: «I realize that I'm the victim of psychological abuse from my own adviser.»

Over the next two weeks, President Guzzella and Vice President Weidmann met on two occasions with Lilly and Carollo to inform them of the restructuring of the Department of Physics and the dissolution of the Institute for Astronomy.

The meetings were emotional. Simon Lilly expressed his deep disappointment with management's plans and said he felt that there was little appreciation for his work and that of his wife. He resigned as department head, effective immediately.

Carollo complained that the accusations made against her had been accepted uncritically and that two doctoral students had been taken from her wi-

thout any attempt at arbitration. Doing so, she said, violated the regulations governing Ph.D. students. Vice President Ulrich Weidmann stonewalled, insisting, according to the minutes, that he had always been sufficiently well-informed of the situation to act.

Mutual trust had been shattered. They reached an agreement that the possibility of early retirement would be reviewed for Lilly and Carollo.

«You're the Problem!»

As an engineer, Lino Guzzella had specialized in optimizing combustion engines. Since taking over as head of the ETH executive board in January 2015, he had sought to introduce improvements at the university. He often didn't hesitate to raise his voice to spur his subordinates to perform as highly as possible, sometimes even demanding they produce Nobel Prizes. Guzzella, 59-years-old at the time, maintained excellent contacts in the political world and was adept at cultivating his own public image. But within ETH Zürich, he was feared and known for his choleric personality. As Carollo was about to experience firsthand.

Guzzella fumed when she and Lilly met with him on May 24. «Why do you think we're here? I'm not the problem, Lilly's not the problem, you're the problem!»

The conversation had actually begun quite civilly.

The president said they wanted to find a solution that did as little harm to her, Lilly and ETH as possible. And that two options were available: early retirement or some way of staying at the university, in both cases following a six-month sabbatical that would allow the situation to settle. A return to ETH Zürich, he said, would only be conceivable if Carollo were to change and behave in an exemplary manner during the coaching sessions that had been agreed to. If that didn't happen, she would first be sent a written warning followed by procedures for her dismissal.

That didn't sit well with Carollo and Lilly. They demanded details about what early retirement might look like. Guzzella replied that Lilly would be given a reduced salary from the end of the year and then an ordinary pension once he turned 65, on the condition that Carollo submitted her resignation and disappeared by December.

No early retirement for Carollo? No salary until her regular retirement age? She thought she must have misunderstood something. So, she asked again, triggering the rage of the ETH president. At least that's how she recalls it. Guzzella also refused to provide any comment about the meeting to Republik.

The Issue with the Boss

The conversation would leave its mark. Professors Carollo and Lilly took their time before making any decisions about the options proposed by Guzzella. Almost an entire month.

For Carollo, the situation was clear: She didn't want to quit under any circumstances. She believed in her innocence – and quitting would be tantamount to admitting guilt. But in conversations with her husband, she expressed doubts. She was tired and had had enough. Her husband felt the same way, and even after a sabbatical, things would never be the same again.

Would it be worth it to spend endless years as a leper at ETH Zürich?

Following long nights of discussions, the couple slowly arrived at the conclusion that they had to fight the injustice they felt was being inflicted upon them. A simple calculation assisted them in making their decision: Carollo and Lilly had concluded that his pension alone would not be enough to cover the mortgage on their home in the Zürich Unterland region just outside the city. Fifteen years earlier, they had come to ETH together, and together, they intended to get through the remaining years until retirement.

On June 23, 2017, Lilly informed ETH President Guzzella that he was rejecting the early retirement offer.

A week later, Lilly and Carollo began their sabbaticals – the point at which Guzzella had actually been hoping to close the case. But he hadn't consulted with the Department of Physics. Inside the department, rumors circulated of a «backroom deal» and people wondered why Guzzella had given Carollo so many concessions. Half a year of paid vacation, followed by coaching – for professors and doctoral students alike, that sounded more like a reward than punishment.

His non-transparent approach would ultimately cost Guzzella support at all levels of the hierarchy.

Ombudsman Wilfred van Gunsteren and future department head Rainer Wallny weren't pleased with the agreement reached by the ETH president either. Neither wanted to see Carollo return to the university, but for different reasons.

Van Gunsteren had already demanded her dismissal back in May for ethical reasons. And Wallny didn't want to have any responsibility for Carollo. They each wrote letters – with strikingly similar wording. Was it a coincidence? Or had they coordinated with each other? It has been proven that they were in contact with each other beforehand. When contacted by Republik, neither van Gunsteren nor Wallny chose to comment on the facts of the case.

«Crossed a Red Line»

The ombudsman addressed his July 10, 2017, letter not only to the president, but also to the entire ETH executive board, the supervisory body for the university's administration. He reported two cases of ethically and legally incorrect behavior. The first was Carollo's behavior toward her doctoral students and staff at the Institute for Astronomy. The second pertained to the handling of the Carollo case by the ETH president.

In the first part of his letter, he provided a summary of his view of events and repeated the demand he made to Guzzella in May: Namely that Professor Carollo be dismissed for conduct unworthy of ETH.

In the second part of the letter, van Gunsteren – who himself had wanted to become ETH president 12 years earlier – mounted a frontal attack against Guzzella. «The «solution» to the problem ordered by the president through a break (sabbatical) followed by a «new beginning» (resumption of work) is a slap in the face of the victims and the people around them», he wrote. The president, he continued, had crossed a red line with his decision to sweep the grievance under the rug. «The ombudspersons have the impression that for the president, «peace and quiet» and «no information about abuses at ETH» are more important than the ethical integrity of the operation and the interests of young people who have placed their trust in ETH.»

The letter ended with a warning that, at some point, the Carollo case would find its way into the public eye. Or was it a threat?

Wallny's letter only went to Guzzella and not the entire ETH executive board. But this letter also packed a punch. He began by outlining his concerns that the measures taken to that point had not been enough to resolve the situation and noted that former staff members at the Institute for Astronomy were concerned that things wouldn't change. He also noted that people had begun asking him at conferences what was wrong at ETH.

We cannot create the impression to people outside ETH that the university «wants to sweep the incidents under the rug», Wallny wrote. «That's why it is extremely important that, together with school management, we are completely clear, both internally and externally.»

In passing, Wallny mentioned an email from Professor Carollo in which she complained about a former doctoral student, expressing her regret that her application for a time slot to use the Hubble Space Telescope had been rejected because the doctoral candidate had not submitted his part of the application.

ETH President Guzzella's response to Wallny's portrayal of the email was severe. By way of registered mail, he accused Carollo of having defamed the Ph.D. student in her email, issued her a reprimand and threatened to fire her if it happened again.

Carollo's attorney at the time, however, notified the ETH legal service that the warning did not comply with legal requirements. The university felt compelled to back down, responding that the letter from Guzzella had not been a formal reprimand at all, but an «informal administrative measure». The English word «reprimand» had only been used, the university's response continued, in case Carollo was unable to understand the German word. Carollo's current lawyer, however, sees the exchange as an attempt to push through a reprimand in a deceitful manner.

The pressure on ETH President Guzzella continued to mount. Both van Gunsteren's letter to the ETH board, in which he accused Guzzella of having remained inactive for too long in the Carollo case, and the lack of support from the physics department, began looking like a threat to his re-election as university president in spring 2018.

But Guzzella wasn't about to stand by idly as others tried to push him out of office. After the failed attempt to issue Carollo a reprimand, he sent a detailed statement to Fritz Schiesser, president of the ETH executive board in which he maintained that there was no reason to dismiss Carollo. In her 15 years of employment at ETH, he noted, nothing negative had ended up in her personnel file. Furthermore, he wrote, the allegations made in the testimonials covered a period of 14 years and could not be definitively verified. As such, he wrote, they could not be used as the basis for termination.

It was a final attempt by the president to stay true to the course he had chartered. Soon, though, everyone at ETH would be fighting against one another – with all of Switzerland watching.

Act Four: The Case Goes Public

Fall 2017: The situation surrounding Marcella Carollo had quieted, at least on the surface. The trees in the Zürich Unterland region had taken on the red hue of fall, but daytime temperatures were still creeping up over 20 degrees Celsius (68 degrees Fahrenheit). It was a day just like any other since the professor had started her sabbatical on July 1. By February 2018, she was planning two brief research stops in Harvard and Sydney, after which she was looking forward to returning to ETH with recharged batteries.

But the calm was deceptive.

On Oct. 18, 2017, the secretary got in touch with Marcella Carollo to tell her that a journalist named René Donzé from the weekly paper NZZ am Sonntag had called. He had said he was working on a story about the closure of the Institute for Astronomy and had apparently learned of the accusations that had been leveled against Carollo. A day later, Donzé wrote the professor directly, telling her that he found it important to learn both sides of the story. He further wrote that it was also in her interest to present her view of events.

The email made Carollo uneasy and she immediately informed the university administration, her department and the communications team. Despite the events of the preceding months, she still maintained a degree of trust in ETH as an institution and hoped that the communications department would issue a statement that protected both ETH and herself. She asked that she be allowed to review the statement before it was sent out to journalists.

Over the course of the next few days, the ETH communications department then sent Carollo three emails, two intentionally and one seemingly by accident.

In the first, the department thanked her for not having spoken directly with the journalist herself and promised that it would handle the situation.

The second, which arrived one day later, likely wasn't meant for her. A member of the communications team wrote: «Dear all, I'm not so sure if we want to send Ms. Carollo our statements given that we don't know which quotes Donzé will be using (likely not all of them). What do you think?»

A short time later, the third mail arrived: «Dear Prof. Carollo, We have given most of our statements orally in the context of a discussion. Providing you with specific statements without the context would not be constructive and overall it is not our policy to distribute HK or SL-statements. In this regard, you will be contacted by the president who will also provide you with additional information in a broader context.»

Three hours later, President Guzzella wrote her that all efforts had been made to protect both ETH as an institution and Professor Carollo. «We expect that the article in the «NZZ am Sonntag» will not be in favor of neither ETH Zurich nor yourself.»

The fourth act had begun.

Two days later, on Oct. 22, 2017, the front page of the NZZ am Sonntag blared out a headline in big, black lettering: «Professor Bullies Students». Donzé wrote that the Institute for Astronomy was being shuttered and chronicled the abuse of power, bullying and other misconduct.

The article did not use the real names of Carollo and her husband, with Donzé having chosen the aliases «Gabriela M.» and «Paul F.» «An extremely well-informed source described cronyism inside ETM», read a passage in the article. «ETH President Lino Guzzella wanted to ensure that the situation was quickly put to rest – if possible, without making a big fuss», it said.

«Nothing on File»

That Sunday was a nightmare for Marcella Carollo. The paper featured serious accusations against her, complemented by quotes from the university communications team that were half-hearted, at most, in their attempts to defend her. She was furious that the article did not mention that the accusations had never been investigated. And she was angry that the story made

it look as though ETH had closed the Institute for Astronomy only because of her.

The only thing the communications department noted in her defense was that for quite some time, ETH had had nothing on file regarding «Gabriela M.» and that for that reason, nothing was done. It had also noted that she had helped some researchers launch successful careers. If «Gabriela M.» were to seek to engage Ph.D. students in the future, the communications team told the paper, she would be closely monitored.

Within hours, most Swiss news sites had published articles of their own about the situation at ETH, and soon, the entire country was aware of the evil deeds allegedly perpetrated by the professor with the pseudonym «Gabriela M.». A single Google search, though, was enough to find out who exactly was behind that alias.

That's when the character assassination began.

An event later that Sunday ultimately proved much more damaging to Carollo than the original newspaper article. At 8:37 p.m., a former post-doc student at Portsmouth University in the UK wrote a long email to the roughly 1000 scientists around the world working on the Dark Energy Survey (DES), a project in which Carollo, Lilly and the Ph.D. candidate Elisabetta Marignano also participated. The former post-doc student and Marignano had met at DES meetings in Detroit and Stanford and had kept in touch. The young Italian scientist wrote that he, too, had been a victim of bullying at his British university. Carollo knew him as well: He had applied several times to her and Lilly, but had never been accepted.

The Community Gets Involved

That email from the former post-doc student brought the ETH misconduct case to the attention of an expanded circle of well-known and influential astronomers. He wrote about his disgust over how the university in Zürich treated Ph.D. candidates and called for solidarity in the face of such behavior. «I say this for our own sake, the sake of science and of this collaboration», he wrote.

Why did the former post-doc student take the step of informing the astronomy community of the true identities of «Gabriela M.» and «Paul F.» just a few hours after the case first came to light? Marignano ignored questions sent by Republik about her connection to the young Italian researcher and his email.

The NZZ am Sonntag article was quickly translated and began making the rounds on social media and science blogs, where highly regarded astrophysicists like Peter Coles of Cardiff University vilified Carollo and Lilly – even though Coles knew neither the couple nor the details of the case. In the comments section of his blog, Carollo was even compared to the film producer Harvey Weinstein, who had been accused that same week of having raped or sexually assaulted multiple women.

Chris Lintott, a professor of astrophysics at Oxford and well-known in Britain as the host of the legendary BBC series «The Sky at Night», got involved by shredding a letter of support for Carollo written by former Ph.D. students and some of her work colleagues. In the letter, they outlined their concern that Carollo was being unfairly portrayed as a bad person and wrote about their personal experiences with her. They vouched for her character and said she was not a bully.

Lintott never actually spoke with the professor, as he confirmed when contacted by Republik.

Von: **Avi Loeb** aloeb@cfa.harvard.edu
Betreff: Re: visit: Jan 30 - Feb 9
Datum: 25. Oktober 2017 um 22:12
An: Marcella marcella@phys.ethz.ch
Kopie: [REDACTED]



Dear Marcella and Simon,

Yesterday and today, some members of the ITC community were alerted to the following reports,

<https://nzzas.nzz.ch/public/eklat-an-eth-professorin-mobbt-studenten-id.1323367>

<https://telescoper.wordpress.com/2017/10/23/the-bullying-scandal-in-zurich/>

<https://www.ethz.ch/en/news-and-events/eth-news/news/2017/10/administrative-enquiry-opened%20.html>

As a result of this newly publicized information, we decided that now would not be the best time for you to visit the ITC, as originally planned. The public distribution of this information creates an uneasy feeling among some ITC members about the visit and we believe that it would be best to postpone the visit to a future date, once the dust will settle.

With kind regards,
Avi

Abraham Loeb
Frank B. Baird Jr. Professor of Science, Harvard University
Chair, [Harvard Astronomy Department](#)
Director, [Institute for Theory and Computation \(ITC\)](#)
Founding Director, [Black Hole Initiative \(BHI\)](#)
Chair, [Breakthrough Starshot Advisory Committee](#)
Vice Chair, [Board on Physics and Astronomy, National Academies](#)

Within just a few days, the invitations that had been extended to Carollo and Lilly from Harvard and the university in Sydney were rescinded. The respected magazine Science also reported on their case, as did the Indian website The Wire. A Canadian professor wrote a «letter of support» for the Ph.D. student victims, which was then signed by around 700 scientists around the world.

ETH Vice Rector Antonio Togni was among the signatories.

Just days after the appearance of the article in NZZ am Sonntag, Carollo's reputation had effectively been destroyed. Now, it was time for the profiteers to do their work.

«Poison in the System»

Kevin Schawinski, a dark-haired man in glasses, has a lot to say. Since opening his Twitter account in 2011, he has written more than 27'000 tweets. As the son of Roger Schawinski, the well-known Swiss radio pioneer and media mogul, he was practically born with a media affinity.

The same year Kevin Schawinski began tweeting, he joined the Institute for Astronomy at ETH as an SNF professor. He had previously completed a Ph.D. at Oxford and a four-year research stint at Yale. An SNF professorship is a six-year position at a Swiss college or university and is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation. The position did not come with the guarantee of a job beyond those six years.

Nevertheless, early on in his tenure at ETH, Schawinski began angling for a full professorship. Even before setting foot on the ETH campus for the first time, he sent an email to inquire about the possibility of a longer position. Carollo, who had been chosen as his mentor, merely reinforced what Schawinski's SNF contract already said: The position came with a six-year time limit.

In fall 2015, though, Schawinski got his hopes up. Because the fourth full Institute for Astronomy professor decided to leave for the U.S., a professorship position unexpectedly opened up. But the remaining three professors – Carollo, Lilly and Refregier – agreed that the professorship should be filled by someone from the same area of research as the departing professor. Schawinski didn't match that profile.

When Elisabetta Marignano lodged her accusations against Carollo in early 2017, Schawinski likewise immediately turned on Carollo and Lilly. Then 35 years old, Schawinski advised the Ph.D. student to get a lawyer and helped her establish contact with President Guzzella. If Schawinski was hoping to soon inherit Carollo's position, though, those hopes would be in vain: The closure of the Institute for Astronomy meant he no longer had any hopes of a future at ETH.

«There Is No Longer an Institute»

In answers to questions put to him as part of the administrative investigation, Schawinski responded: «My position expires in August 2018 and at that point I will no longer work in science. I was given plenty of unofficial promises. But there is no longer an institute.»

It appeared that Schawinski laid most of the blame at the feet of Carollo and Lilly, a couple he referred to as «poison in the system». During the administrative investigation, he presented a long list of accusations, all of which proved to be untrue. Here is a small selection:

- Carollo, he said, was thrown out of the Swiss National Science Foundation and was being investigated for misuse of funds. Both accusations were false, as the SNF confirmed when contacted by Republik.
- Carollo, Schawinski further claimed, had sabotaged his job search. But the professor is able to provide proof that she wrote several letters of recommendation for him and also nominated him for prizes on a number of occasions.
- Schawinski also accused Carollo of having fired an Israeli post-doc for no good reason. But documents that Republik has obtained show that Carollo worked well with the Israeli post-doc for several years, that she extended his position beyond its originally intended duration and was able to help him get a professorship in Tel Aviv. As he departed, he wrote an email in which he expressed extreme gratitude to Carollo: «I wanted to thank you, again, for the great part you played in my experience here. (...) I learned a lot during my time at the ETH (both in terms of astrophysics and in general), and I will always cherish the memories from these 5 amazing years.»

In response to an inquiry from Republik as to whether he had a personal interest in Carollo being found guilty, Schawinski wrote in an email: «Carollo and Lilly have broken so many students and post-docs that the human cost is immense. It is important and correct that they be held accountable.»

Schawinski's father also joined in the attack on Carollo. On «Roger against Markus», his show on the Zürich-based Radio 1, which he owns, Roger Schawinski addressed the Carollo case on Nov. 5, 2018. He was extremely critical of both the professor and ETH President Guzzella, claiming that he had insider information thanks to his son. «ETH – one of the 10 best universities in the world – no longer has an institute for astrophysics because Mr. Guzzella is of the opinion that everything must be covered up», Roger Schawinski said. «It is becoming clear the incredible effect improper conduct by the ETH president can have.»

His partner on the show, Markus Somm, formerly the editor-in-chief and publisher of the newspaper Basler Zeitung, agreed. It is unbelievable, he said, that such an insufferable professor, whose comportment was first covered up by her husband, cannot be fired immediately.

The Investigation Begins

Back to fall 2017. On the day the article appeared in NZZ am Sonntag, the ETH board gathered for a meeting to address what had become a serious

situation. Now that the public had become aware of the goings on in the Institute for Astronomy, decisive action had to be taken.

For weeks, the ETH board had been discussing how it should respond to the complaint filed by Ombudsman Wilfred van Gunsteren in July. In the complaint, van Gunsteren had demanded that Professor Marcella Carollo be fired and had accused ETH President Lino Guzzella of wanting to «sweep» the issue «under the carpet».

Now, the ETH board decided that the university administration should launch an investigation into the events that took place at the Institute for Astronomy. Thus far, the board noted, it was «unclear whether the accusations are completely or partly accurate and why neither the administration nor other organizational bodies were aware of them over the course of years».

The ETH board exempted President Guzzella from the investigation, noting that there was no evidence of ethically inappropriate conduct. The focus of the investigation was to be solely on «possible leadership misconduct by X (Carollo)».

And there, the focus was to be doubly exacting. Suddenly, it wasn't just the bullying accusations that were to be examined, but also whether she was guilty of academic misconduct.

It is important to remember that just months earlier, ETH Vice President Ulrich Weidmann had assured the professor that the accusations raised by Ombudsman van Gunsteren were insignificant. At that time, it was Carollo who demanded that ETH launch an internal investigation in order to prove her innocence. Since then, however, the situation had changed.

In late November 2017, Carollo's fate was in the hands of a pair of men: Professor Bernhard Plattner, who was to conduct an internal examination in the search for academic misconduct. And Markus Rüssli, an external lawyer who had been tasked with carrying out the administrative investigation.

Both investigations would descend into farce.

Counterstatement by the ETH

- The Republik states: *«She has been accused of workplace harassment, but the allegations have never been substantiated.»* This is not true.

The truth is: The independent external investigator has conducted an investigation to clarify the allegations made against the professor.

- The Republik states: *«None of them [members of the ETH management] adhered to the conflict resolution process prescribed by the university.»* This is not true.

The truth is: All university entities and persons involved have adhered to the procedures set down in the applicable laws, ordinances and regulations.

- The Republik states: *«In his [Wallny's] view, taking away all of Carollo's doctoral students and requiring her to participate in coaching sessions didn't go far enough.»* It is not true that doctoral students were taken away from the professor.

The truth is: According to the ETH Ordinance on Doctoral Studies, doctoral students are able to escalate differences of opinion to a higher level. If necessary, ETH assumes the role of mediator and supports them in changing their supervisors. In this case, two doctoral students made use of this option.

- The Republik states: *«Carollo and Lilly would be marginalized. And the Institute for Astronomy, which the couple had spent a decade and a half building up, and in which around 40 million Swiss francs had been invested, was to be eliminated.»* This is not true.

The truth is: Scientific research in the field of astronomy was able to continue. To this end, the department was restructured, Professor Lilly and Professor Carollo carried on their work in independent professorships and the rest of the Institute of Astronomy (one full and one associate professor, plus one SNSF-sponsored professor) was integrated into the new Institute for Particle Physics and Astrophysics.

- The Republik states: *«Lilly's successor as department head was to be found by a search committee headed by Wallny. A few months later, Wallny was selected to take the top job.»* This is not true.

The truth is: Rainer Wallny was not part of the selection committee – this comprised the professors A. Vaterlaus (chair), M. Sigrist and A. Wallraff.

- The Republik states: *«Carollo still hadn't been granted the right to tell her side of the story.»* This is not true.

The truth is: Professor Carollo was repeatedly given the opportunity to comment on the allegations made against her, and was thus granted a fair hearing.

ETH Zurich

Republik stands by its reporting.

The ETH Case – Coming Up in the Next Installment

For the ETH administration, it had become clear that Professor Carollo had to go. In spring 2018, President Lina Guzzella, who had long resisted calls to fire the professor, surprisingly declined a second term in office. And just 74 days after Joël Mesot had replaced Guzzella, the new ETH president held a press conference that would have grave consequences for Carollo.

About the Authors

Silvan Aeschlimann is an author and journalist who lives in Zürich and Barcelona. His novels «Glück ist teuer» (2017) and «Ungehört» (2013) deal with issues like the pressure to perform, economic growth and materialism.

Dominik Osswald studied geology, is an enthusiastic mountaineer and a freelance journalist. He reports for magazines and TV broadcasters on efforts to reform Switzerland's pension system and on the #MeToo debate, extreme mountaineering expeditions and climate change. He has worked for the Basler Zeitung, Tages-Anzeiger and the TV news programs «10 vor 10» and «Rundschau» for Swiss public broadcaster SRF.

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