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**Report on the nine confidential statements written by ex-members of the Institute of Astronomy of the Department of Physics at the ETH about their experiences in the research group of Prof. M. Carollo, covering the period 2003 till 2017**

## **1. Introduction**

The ombudsman has received nine statements (about 24 pages) written by ex-members (PhDs and post-docs) of the Institute of Astronomy of the Department of Physics (D-PHYS) of the ETH about their experiences in the research group of Prof. M. Carollo (MC) of this institute. The statements cover the period 2013 to 2017. He has received permission from the authors of these statements to show these to the Board (Schulleitung) of the ETH, but explicitly no permission to show these under any circumstances to MC, because as one of the authors wrote: ‘She (i.c. MC, WFvG) is free to defend herself from the accusation of abuse, but this can’t further involve the privacy and the dignity of people who suffered so much and still suffer. In response to her abominations both I and these people believe that the Institute needs to proceed in order to re-establish the order protecting the victims and the current employees.’ Since the Ombudsman would want to hear the opinion of MC about the complaints and allegations formulated in the nine statements while upholding the confidentiality to which he is bound, he decided to compose a summary of the nine statements about the behaviour of MC during her tenure at the ETH such that no trace to the authors of the statements can be detected.

## **2. Summary of statements, complaints and allegations**

The complaints, allegations and statements by the authors concern the way the group is managed by MC, the scientific support offered to group members by MC and the impact these had on the personal lives and careers of the authors. The complaints, allegations and statements boil down to the following.

1. PhDs, post-docs and secretaries did leave the MC group prematurely because of the prevailing working conditions. Some were forced to leave. Some gave up their dream of working in the field of astronomy: “This woman steals your work, your dreams and your life”. Successful PhDs and post-docs generally had external collaborators in their projects.
2. Psychological pressure was exerted on group members, in particular female ones, leading to psychological suffering. It was not exceptional that female students were crying after having had a meeting with MC.
3. An atmosphere of fear reigned in the group because of psychological pressure (e.g. the threat not to extend a temporary contract) exerted on members and belittling them in public: “an unbearable, hostile atmosphere that blocked scientific and personal progress”. One had to stick to the rules, advice and expectations set by MC or unpleasant repercussions would follow.

4. Inappropriate statements were made by MC in front of co-workers. MC was not able to maintain a professional relationship with co-workers. MC showed moody behaviour, mixing personal with scientific considerations. MC often made negative comments on ex-group members, other persons, drafts of manuscripts, colleagues, etc. Scientific disagreement was considered to be disrespectful behaviour. Citation: “What I found most daunting, is that instead of being a nurturing scientific mentor, MC was an obstacle to my development as a scientist”.
5. It was some group members forbidden to interact about work with PhD students or post-docs from other groups or even within the MC group. If ignored trouble with MC would lie ahead.
6. PhDs had no free choice of lectures they wanted to follow during their PhD period. It was even sometimes forbidden to follow lectures in astronomy given by colleagues of MC.
7. Acceptance of a PhD thesis by MC was made dependent on the delivery of drafts of manuscripts for journals.
8. Students were required to show up for a meeting with MC late in the evening for long sessions of low scientific content. E-mails sent by MC to group members during the weekend were expected to be answered immediately.
9. Holidays were sometimes not allowed to be taken or even had to be cancelled upon demand by MC, thereby interfering with family obligations of group members.
10. Projects could unexpectedly be taken away from group members to be handed over to others.
11. Group members experienced little scientific input or advice from MC. MC would be “scientifically intolerable to work with” and “unfit to managing a team of aspiring scientists”. “It was difficult to do science under the guidance of a professor drawn to paranoia, narcissism and obsession with non-scientific conversation about her reputation”.
12. MC did put herself as first author on papers written by others, manipulating (co-)authorship. Images of objects obtained experimentally were manipulated on the computer to render them more convincing in regard to a particular hypothesis.
13. Some citations: “During my work at the ETH, I have seen how other people and particularly PhD students suffered from her abusive and highly unprofessional behaviour.” My time with MC was “a dark episode in my life” or “the unhappiest time of my life”. “I sincerely hope that the situation changes for good at the department of Astronomy at ETH, and that no more students or postdocs continue to suffer while trying to pursue their scientific careers.”.
14. It seems that already in 2005 the ombudsman of the ETH had been informed about the problems in the group of MC, but that his comment was: “We know the problem, there is nothing we can do”.

