

Meeting of the ETH Board of 26/27 September 2018

ETH Board considers international cooperation and networking to be in jeopardy

At its meeting of 26/27 September 2018, the ETH Board emphasised the great significance of international cooperation and networking for education, research and innovation. Without a framework agreement with the EU, there is a danger that Switzerland will be excluded from the EU's research framework programmes. The Self-Determination Initiative, which will be put to the ballot in November, also jeopardises international cooperation and thus the success of the universities and of research in Switzerland.

Berne, 27 September 2018 – At its meeting of 26/27 September, the ETH Board expressed its concern regarding the state of the negotiations on the framework agreement with the EU, as well as the forthcoming vote on the Self-Determination Initiative. The ETH Board calls on the political actors to campaign for stable and reliable relations with the European Union (EU).

International cooperation as a success factor

One success factor of Swiss science is its strong international networking. Without a framework agreement, participation in the EU's research framework programmes (EU-FP) is in jeopardy. International competition is important for Switzerland's educational institutions to be able to stay at the top. Therefore the ETH Board regards international research programmes as very important. They provide Switzerland with an opportunity to exchange ideas with the best researchers and to stand its ground in the competition for international funds. The funding programmes of the EU are also important for the Swiss economy. Swiss SMEs are involved in more than 20 percent of projects with Swiss participation. A quarter of all financial contributions to Swiss institutions also goes to SMEs and into industry. The EU's FP cannot be replaced by national programmes. An exclusion from these would have a great impact on Switzerland's innovative power in the medium and long term.

Self-Determination Initiative also creates insecurity for research in Switzerland

On 25 November, the Self-Determination Initiative will be put to the vote. The ETH Board considers that this initiative places Switzerland's good and reliable international relations in jeopardy and would have an adverse effect on Swiss research. Insecurity is poison for research. This manifested itself after the adoption of the Mass Immigration Initiative and the resulting exclusion of Switzerland from Horizon 2020 by the EU. Consequently, Switzerland participated in distinctly fewer projects and also suffered from a severe decline in project coordination and funding.

Tanja Zimmermann appointed new member of Empa's Board of Directors

At its meeting of 26/27 September 2018, the ETH Board appointed Tanja Zimmermann as a new member of Empa's Board of Directors. The Hamburg-born scientist studied wood science and technology and took over as head of the research group at Empa in 2001. From 2011 onwards, she was Head of Applied Wood Materials Laboratory. Thanks to her curiosity, creativity and scientific competence, she succeeded in earning international renown for a field of research that used to be unknown. Together with her team, she developed new materials out of wood and its components. This includes bio-based 3D inks which can be used in biomedicine, for instance. In a residential unit for students at Empa's NEST, she is testing various wood applications such as antimicrobial, magnetic or refractory wood. Since September 2017, Tanja Zimmermann has headed the new Functional Materials Department. She won over the appointment committee with her leadership skills and her profound scientific expertise.

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The ETH Board is the strategic management and supervisory body of the ETH Domain. The ETH Domain is made up of the two Federal Institutes of Technology, i.e. ETH Zurich and EPFL, as well as the four federal research institutes PSI, WSL, Empa and Eawag. The members of the ETH Board are appointed by the Swiss Federal Council. The ETH Board supervises the development plans of the institutions, is responsible for strategic management accounting and ensures coordination. It draws up the budget and the financial statements of the ETH Domain and coordinates the value maintenance and continued functionality of the properties. It is the authority responsible for appointments and represents the ETH Domain before the federal authorities. A staff unit assists the ETH Board in the preparation and implementation of its business.