Meeting of the ETH Board of 8/9 March 2017

Reinforcing research for a Swiss Industry 4.0

In its strategy for 2017–2020, the ETH Board champions future-oriented fields of research. Digitalisation, in particular, is confronting industry with great challenges. Through close cooperation with companies, the ETH Domain makes an important contribution towards the development of Industry 4.0 in Switzerland. Strategic focus areas include "Advanced Manufacturing", "Data Science", "Energy" and "Personalised Health". Also, in view of the inflation adjustment and the cost-cutting programmes announced by the Federal Council, it is of concern to the ETH Board to emphasise that investments in the ETH Domain generate significant value creation in the Swiss economy.

Berne, 9 March 2017 – At its meeting of 8/9 March 2017, the ETH Board resolved to immediately increase investment in the promising research fields that are vital for Switzerland. Digitalisation is progressing rapidly and the ETH Domain is exercising a leading function in this respect. It is along these lines that the ETH Board allocated the resources for 2018 to the two universities ETH Zurich and EPFL, as well as to the four research institutions PSI, WSL, Empa and Eawag.

Research for the benefit of the Swiss economy and of Swiss society

In its 2016 winter session, the Parliament had decided to increase the funds requested by the Federal Council for the ETH Domain for the period of 2017–2020 by 160m CHF. This should enable the ETH Domain to make planned investments which the ETH Board had abandoned in the wake of the cuts resulting from the Confederation's 2017–2019 stabilisation programme. In view of the inflation adjustment and the cost-cutting programmes announced by the Confederation, the ETH Board underlines the ETH Domain's importance in research and teaching for the Swiss economy. In the age of digitalisation, the ETH Domain makes a crucial contribution to development and production work in Switzerland, as well as towards its further development into Industry 4.0. The institutions of the ETH Domain make a major contribution towards Switzerland's continuing to remain one of the world's most innovative countries. They enjoy a high reputation both nationally and internationally and regularly occupy top positions in the rankings, particularly in the field of computer sciences. The ETH Board maintains that one important element in this success story is adequate funding received from the Confederation.

Possible reduction in financial resources contributed by the Confederation

After the planned cuts resulting from the Confederation's first stabilisation programme, Parliament rescinded part of these cuts in December 2016. Since the Confederation expects structural deficits in the federal budget, the Federal Council opted for an inflation adjustment of 3% and proposals for cost-cutting measures in early March. The ETH Board acknowledges the Confederation's difficult financial situation but is worried that the ETH Domain, too, is being threatened by substantial cuts. As a consequence of these fluctuations, the ETH Domain's financial situation is uncertain at present.

If the inflation adjustment of 3% on loosely tied transfer expenditure and the retrenchment plans should be implemented in the next few years, this would be tantamount to a reduction in funds by approx. 270m CHF for the period of 2018–2020. The increase of 160m CHF resolved by Parliament would be overcompensated for. Particularly in view of the digitalisation of the Swiss economy, the ETH Domain's future-oriented strategic projects are of great significance for Switzerland as a centre of education and research. A reduction in funds would not be beneficial for the Swiss economy.

New member of the Direction at PSI

On application of the Director of PSI, Prof. Joël Mesot, the ETH Board appointed Prof. Andreas Pautz as a new member of the Direction. Andreas Pautz was appointed Full Professor of Nuclear Technology at

EPFL and Head of Laboratory for Reactor Physics and Systems Behaviour at PSI in October 2012. In the past four years, he has made a crucial contribution to strategy development in the research field of nuclear energy and security. Besides his proven scientific skills, he also enjoys the benefits of an extensive network in academia, industry and the regulatory environment, and he is a member of numerous international bodies, among them the OECD/NEA and of IAEA. He will take office as a member of the Direction of PSI on 1 May 2017.

Consolidated 2016 Report

Finally, the ETH Board approved the consolidated 2016 Report. The ETH Domain's Annual Report with the consolidated financial statements for 2016 will be submitted to the Federal Council and the Parliament and will be published in late April.

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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 controlling 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 assists the ETH Board in the preparation and implementation of its business.