AVETH
Association of Academic Staff

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An open letter from the Academic Association of Scientific Staff at ETH Zurich Board to the ETH Community

Universities are not merely places where research is conducted, courses are attended, and careers are launched. Universities are institutions with a responsibility towards society and future generations. At ETH Zurich, this responsibility is reflected in the values of accountability, openness, and service to society. These principles should not end at the boundaries of research and teaching. They should also inform how ETH and organizations associated with ETH engage with external companies and institutions.

We are therefore concerned about the participation of companies facing serious ethical and societal controversies in events organized within the ETH community, particularly when such participation takes place without publicly available and transparent guidelines for the selection of external partners.

The upcoming participation of Palantir at the Campus Interview event organized by ETH Juniors brings this issue once again to attention.

Palantir is not simply another technology company. Its involvement in military operations, intelligence services, surveillance, and predictive technologies has generated substantial public controversy and raised serious questions about human rights, privacy, democratic accountability, and the societal consequences of its technologies. In Switzerland and across Europe, the company's activities have repeatedly prompted public debate, institutional scrutiny, and opposition.

Against this background, providing Palantir, as well as other companies facing significant ethical concerns, with access to ETH associated recruitment platforms is not an ethically neutral decision.

We recognize that career events play an important role in connecting students and researchers with potential employers. Students should be free to explore career opportunities and make their own informed decisions. At the same time, participation in such events provides companies with direct access to highly qualified talent, reputational benefits, and visibility within the institutional environment of one of the world's leading universities.

Such visibility constitutes a form of institutional support, whether or not it is intended as an endorsement. Yet many student and academic organizations currently operate without explicit ethical criteria for selecting corporate partners, sponsors, or event participants. While practical considerations such as resources, existing relationships, or demand are understandable, we believe they should be complemented by transparent principles that also consider ethical and societal impacts.

This is particularly important when organizations benefit from their association with ETH Zurich. Even where an event is independently organized and does not represent the university's official position, the ETH name, community, and institutional environment

contribute to its attractiveness and credibility. Such an association carries responsibilities that extend beyond the immediate interests of event organizers and participating companies.

The debate, however, should not begin nor end with Palantir. The broader question is: *what responsibilities do ETH and affiliated organizations have when deciding which external actors receive access, visibility, and institutional support within our academic community*?

AVETH is currently adopting engagement guidelines to support decisions concerning partnerships, sponsorships, collaborations, and events. These guidelines reflect values including responsibility, justice, trust, sustainability, diversity, and service to society. They encourage consideration not only of the immediate benefits of an engagement, but also of its broader societal implications.

We therefore call on ETH and affiliated organizations to develop and adopt transparent engagement guidelines that explicitly consider ethical and societal impacts, ensure accountability in decision-making, and provide a meaningful basis for declining partnerships that conflict with fundamental institutional values.

More broadly, we call for a constructive and serious discussion across the ETH community about the responsibilities associated with institutional visibility and access. This discussion should involve students, doctoral researchers, scientific staff, university leadership, and the associations that represent them.

ETH Zurich's commitment to serving society should be reflected not only in the knowledge we produce, but also in the relationships we choose to cultivate.

Kind regards,
AVETH Board

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