

Despite protests, European Patent Office's Battistelli remains in office

The EPO Administrative Council has adopted a resolution in which the subliminal message is plainly one of condemnation. The wording contains orders for action on the part of the beleaguered President.

By Katja Riedel

Despite loud protests and ongoing demands for his resignation by the workforce, the boss of the European Patent Office (EPO), Benoît Battistelli, continues to remain in office. The Administrative Council of the organization adopted a resolution at its meeting with Battistelli, which was ongoing since Wednesday, which contains orders for the President to act – and also indicates annoyance about his actions. Nevertheless, the Council did not challenge his position at the head of the EPO. They did, however, express serious concerns about the fact that for many months a bitter struggle has been raging between the management and staff of the Office. Battistelli's opponents had hoped that he would resign, or that the Administrative Council would dismiss him. The employees are up in arms about his stringent reforms, while Battistelli is aiming to trim the Office towards greater efficiency. Staff members have also repeatedly been complaining about serious attacks on their fundamental rights, and also about a range of internal investigation procedures. The Administrative Council, on which representatives of the 38 Member States sit, had already ordered Battistelli last year to restore social peace within the Office, but since then the situation in the international organization, with 7000 employees, has escalated still further. In the interim, a number of leading members of the staff union Suepo have been dismissed by Battistelli, with accusations of serious personal misdemeanours and talk of smear campaigns against the Office management. The union members, by way of their attorneys, vehemently deny any wrongdoing.

Contrary to the demands made just a few weeks ago by the Administrative Council, these controversial disciplinary proceedings are not now going to be investigated by an outside agency, which has been a major cause of dispute between Battistelli and the Chair of the Council. Instead, the agreement now contains the proviso that Battistelli can allow future cases to be examined externally, and agreed on with the Council – a request, not an instruction. The same applies to the engagement of a mediator, which Battistelli has also up to now rejected. It seems unlikely that the resolution is going to calm things down.